



**The Position Statement on Climate change and respiratory disease will be available on the website of the European Respiratory Journal from 05:00 CET on Saturday 1 August 2009.**

## **Respiratory doctors call for EU action on climate change**

**Brussels 1 August 2009** – The risk of premature death due to temperature increases associated with global warming is six times higher for Europeans who are already suffering from respiratory problems, according to a paper published today.

Two leading health organisations, the European Respiratory Society (ERS) and the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), want to ensure that the respiratory health effects and costs of climate change are considered in all discussions and recommended actions at the EU level.

The position paper published today **(1)** by the ERS describes the heavy burden of temperature increases and poor air quality on people whose health is already compromised due to respiratory problems, such as asthma, respiratory tract infections, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) **(2)**. For instance, a one degree Celsius increase in temperature produces a 1-3% increase in deaths in the general population, but this same temperature increase results in a 6% increase in deaths among people with respiratory conditions.

Professor Jon Ayres, director of the Institute of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, University of Birmingham, UK and lead author of the paper in the European Respiratory Journal says: "*In the summer when temperatures rise significantly, the effect on patients with lung disease is marked. If we can provide better warning systems and information for respiratory patients, and encourage stronger EU action to mitigate the effects of climate change, fewer people will die unnecessarily.*"

The ERS encourages its doctors to speak out and to educate healthcare professionals on the impact of hotter temperatures on their patients. The ERS, the leading medical society for lung health, which brings together some 9000 respiratory clinicians and scientists in over 100 countries worldwide, is working together with HEAL to emphasise the impact on health of climate change to policy makers in current discussions on climate change **(3)**.

HEAL has welcomed the publication of the position paper by the ERS, which represents a first from a specialist medical society. Representing more than 60 health and environment organisations, HEAL would like to see other specialist medical bodies producing similar position papers so that the scale of the impact for health of climate change becomes more widely known.

In June 2009, HEAL called upon the European Union to send a health delegation to the deal-making climate change talks in Copenhagen in December 2009 **(4)**. The aim is to draw attention to the often overlooked benefits of strong, "health-proofed" climate change policy for health. "*Recent research shows that the cleaner air associated with climate change policies can reduce hospital admissions and premature deaths,*" says Génon Jensen, Executive Director of the Health and Environment Alliance. "*This would represent future savings to society and health systems of up to 25 billion Euros per year in monetary terms.*" **(5)**

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**Notes for journalists**

1. ERS Position Statement, Climate change and respiratory disease: European Respiratory Society position statement, J G Ayres et al, European Respiratory Journal 2009; 34: 295-302

**Available for public access as of 05:00 CET on Saturday 1 August 2009 at the following links:**

<http://erj.ersjournals.com/cgi/content/full/34/2/295> (HTML)

<http://erj.ersjournals.com/cgi/reprint/34/2/295> (PDF)

2. In Europe, as elsewhere, lung diseases are among the leading causes of mortality and morbidity and a further increase in mortality is expected in the future if adequate policy responses are not taken. Respiratory diseases rank second (after cardiovascular disease) in terms of mortality, incidence, prevalence and costs with an estimated yearly financial burden of €102 billion in Europe and 68 million deaths world wide by 2020. Lung cancer, pneumonia and COPD are the main respiratory causes of death in Europe. Moreover, hundreds of millions of people suffer every day from chronic respiratory diseases. According to the latest WHO estimates (2007), currently 300 million people have asthma, 210 million people have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) while countless millions have allergic rhinitis and other, often under-diagnosed, chronic respiratory diseases. **For more information on respiratory diseases, see: [www.european-lung-foundation.org](http://www.european-lung-foundation.org)**
3. HEAL has launched a campaign to push health to the centre of the debate on climate change. It organised several seminars on this theme and produced advocacy materials. HEAL works in close collaboration with the Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) Europe, which has recently produced a joint report with the World Health Organization entitled "Healthy Hospitals, Healthy Planet, Healthy People, Addressing climate change in health care settings". (See [www.noharm.org](http://www.noharm.org))
4. HEAL and HCWH Europe press release: Call for "health check" at climate change talks [http://env-health.org/IMG/pdf/PR\\_BonnEU\\_delegation\\_100609\\_FINAL.pdf](http://env-health.org/IMG/pdf/PR_BonnEU_delegation_100609_FINAL.pdf)
5. The 25 billion Euro figure is taken from the "Co-benefits of stronger climate change policy" report. It was commissioned by HEAL and others, and authored by Dr Mike Holland, an independent consultant who has worked with the European Commission and the World Health Organization on similar cost-benefit analyses. For this paper, Dr Holland used the European Commission's model. It is available at [http://www.env-health.org/IMG/pdf/Co-benefits\\_to\\_health\\_report\\_-\\_september\\_2008.pdf](http://www.env-health.org/IMG/pdf/Co-benefits_to_health_report_-_september_2008.pdf)

**The European Respiratory Society (ERS)** is a not-for-profit international medical organisation composed of some 9000 individual members in over 100 countries who represent pneumologists and other medical disciplines (paediatricians, intensive care, oncology, thoracic surgeons, epidemiologists etc); scientists and allied health professionals in the field of respiratory medicine across Europe and globally. The ERS mission is to alleviate suffering from respiratory disease and to promote lung health through research, knowledge sharing, medical and public education and advocacy. Website: [www.ersnet.org](http://www.ersnet.org)

**Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)** aims to raise awareness of how environmental protection and sustainability improves health and to empower the health community to contribute their expertise to policy making. Since its inception, HEAL's membership has grown to include a diverse network of more than 50 citizens', patients', women's, health professionals' and environmental organizations across Europe which together have a strong track record in increasing public and expert engagement in both EU debates and the decision-making process. Website: [www.env-health.org](http://www.env-health.org)