



BRUSSELS, 17 OCTOBER 2023

To: Members of the ENVI committee

Health call for swift pesticide reduction to prevent disease and save on healthcare costs

Dear Member of the European Parliament,

In view of the upcoming ENVI vote on the Regulation on the Sustainable use of Pesticide Regulation (SUR) on 24 October, we, the undersigned health organisations, call on you to swiftly advance the SUR negotiations and strengthen the protection of people in Europe against hazardous pesticides, as a key law to prevent disease.

Pollution, including from pesticides, has a major impact on people's health across the EU. Approximately 20% of all diseases and deaths could be prevented by reducing pollution and protecting nature. With the zero-pollution objective and action plan, the EU has set the core framework to prevent disease and ill-health, as well as to prevent health costs which result from productivity loss, doctors' visits related to pollution in the air, water and food among other things.

Pesticides threaten people's health, and children are especially at risk

The [body of evidence on the harmful effects of hazardous pesticides](#) for people's health is substantial, and has significantly grown over the past years. Pesticides can impact human health through direct exposure, and indirectly via a degradation of the environment and ecosystems.

Studies have linked the direct exposure to hazardous pesticides to a range of health impacts and diseases in adults and children. This includes cancer, such as non-Hodgkin lymphoma and prostate cancer in adults, and leukemia and tumours of the nervous system in children. In addition, pesticide exposure can lead to neurodegenerative diseases (including Parkinson's disease), cognitive impairment, neurodevelopmental and behavioural disorders, respiratory health disorders, harm to the hormone system, and reproductive

disorders in adults.

Pesticide exposure is of particular concern for children, as it can harm their healthy development, increasing their risk for disease later in life. Studies have found that some pesticides are able to alter DNA, leading to the passing of health risks through generations.

A 2022 hair testing citizen science project, the Pesticide CheckUp, with 300 participants from 15 EU countries, found pesticides that are linked to harmful health-impacts in the hair of nearly every third person – and the analysis only monitored 6% of all active pesticide substances currently authorised in the EU.

Pesticides impact biodiversity, with consequences for people’s health

Biodiversity is crucial to human nutrition and people’s health, ensuring soil productivity and maintaining the genetic resources for all crops, livestock and marine species harvested for food.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), intensified food production through – among other things – pesticide use, has [negative effects on biodiversity](#).

The decline in the number of pollinators can lead to losses in crops for fruits, vegetables, and nuts, which in turn can lead to a shift toward unhealthier diets and increase in related chronic illnesses such as heart disease, cancer, and stroke. As underlined by WHO, a diet rich in varied nutrients is a “fundamental determinant of health”.

Urgent need to reduce pesticide use to prevent disease

Given the extent of the health impacts of pesticide exposure for people’s health, and their contribution to harming the natural environment, a swift reduction in pesticide use is key.

With the proposal for a Regulation on the Sustainable Use of Pesticide, the EU has a unique opportunity to prevent people from suffering and to cut down on health economic cost, as a key component in reducing pollution. A swift and ambitious adoption of the SUR would also help to implement the [Budapest Ministerial Declaration](#), in which countries of the WHO European region committed to prioritise measures to cutting down on pollution, biodiversity loss and climate change.

We, the undersigned health groups call on you to:

1. Swiftly negotiate a legally-binding health-first update of EU pesticides rules to protect current and future generations

Shelving the draft SUR proposal or weakening its core provisions would not only be a disservice to farmers and people’s health, but also a missed opportunity to tackle the significant [health costs associated with exposure to pesticides and other chemical substances](#). To prevent further serious health impacts and to safeguard the health of current and future generations, EU decision makers need to adopt the legally-binding SUR. This would also mean hearing [the call of over 3,300 scientists from across Europe](#), who came out in support of the SUR, calling it a “cornerstone of food security and human health”.

2. End the use of hazardous pesticides by 2035

Clear and measurable targets need to be set including for member states, to reduce Europe's dependency on chemical pesticides. [Over one million people in the EU](#) call for an 80% gradual reduction of the use of synthetic pesticides by 2030, and a total phase out by 2035.

3. Create pesticide-free areas and adequate buffer zones

Given the evidence on the threat of pesticides particularly for children, pesticide use should be ended especially in areas frequented by those most at risk. This includes residential areas, such as public parks and gardens, sports and recreational grounds, school grounds, children's playgrounds, and around healthcare facilities. Pesticide-free buffer zones of up to 100 metres should be introduced.

We call on you to act urgently and decisively to strengthen health protection across the European Union and are available for any questions.

Yours sincerely,

Anne Stauffer
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Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)

On behalf of:

Cantine sans plastique France
Community Hygiene Concern CIO
Génération Futures
International Society of Doctors for Environment (ISDE) Italy
Mutualités Libres/Onafhankelijke Ziekenfondsen
Portuguese Society of Environmental Health
Réseau Environnement Santé
Stichting Ecobaby
Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF) France

The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) is the leading not-for-profit organisation addressing how the environment affects human health in the European Union (EU) and beyond. HEAL works to shape laws and policies that promote planetary and human health and protect those most affected by pollution, and raise awareness on the benefits of environmental action for health.

HEAL's over 90 member organisations include international, European, national and local groups of health professionals, not-for-profit health insurers, patients, citizens, women, youth, and environmental experts representing over 200 million people across the 53 countries of the WHO European Region.

As an alliance, HEAL brings independent and expert evidence from the health community to EU and global decision-making processes to inspire disease prevention and to promote a toxic-free, low-carbon, fair and healthy future.

HEAL's EU Transparency Register Number: 00723343929-96