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Health Effects of Changing Environment

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Abstract

Environment plays a crucial role in our economic, social and cultural behaviour as well as on health. However, since the beginning of industrialization era, focus on economic development has caused detrimental effects on the environment. Last two centuries have witnessed changes in global environmental factors such as rise in temperature leading to global warming, depletion of stratospheric ozone layer, loss of biodiversity and marked degradation in air and water quality due to atmospheric pollution, thereby causing upsurge in infectious and non-infectious diseases. Environmental health has emerged as an important part of medicine. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 24% of global disease burden and 23% of all deaths can be attributed to environmental factors. Deaths from heart disease, cancer, respiratory disorders and many vector-borne diseases such as malaria, dengue, chikungunya and cholera have increased due to changes in climate, especially in developing countries. Besides limited attention to sanitation, hygiene, as well as quality of food and drinking water, factors such as deforestation, increasing vehicular traffic, migration from rural to urban areas, decreasing water resources and inadequate drainage systems contribute to increase incidence of diseases. The need of the hour is to sensitize ourselves about the way our ecology is being degraded and the health effects it is causing. A holistic view is needed to address the problem of environmental health where agriculture, animal husbandry, public health, water safety and air pollution need to be looked at in a combined manner for education, planning and resource allocation.

