

# PREVENTING FUTURE PANDEMICS: CURB CLIMATE CHANGE AND PROTECT ENVIRONMENT, SAYS UN REPORT

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

Undeterred: Health workers wearing PPE suits arrive for check-ups at a containment zone in Malvani despite heavy rain on July 5, 2020. | Photo Credit: [PTI](#)

Land degradation, wildlife exploitation, intensive farming and climate change are driving the rise in diseases that, like the coronavirus, are passed from animals to humans, United Nations experts said on Monday.

The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) jointly identified seven trends responsible for such diseases, known as zoonotic, calling on governments to take steps to stop future pandemics.

These are:

“The science is clear that if we keep exploiting wildlife and destroying our ecosystems, then we can expect to see a steady stream of these diseases jumping from animals to humans in the years ahead,” said UNEP Executive Director Inger Andersen. “Pandemics are devastating to our lives and our economies, and as we have seen over the past months, it is the poorest and the most vulnerable who suffer the most. To prevent future outbreaks, we must become much more deliberate about protecting our natural environment.”

How pandemics begin

About 60% of known infectious diseases in humans and 75% of all emerging infectious diseases are zoonotic, she said, largely due to the increased interaction between humans, animals and the environment.

The new [coronavirus](#), which is most likely to have originated in bats, has infected more than 11 million people and killed over half a million people globally, according to the Johns Hopkins University.

But it is just one in a growing number of diseases including Ebola, MERS, West Nile fever, Zika, SARS and Rift Valley fever that have jumped from animal hosts into the human population in recent years, said the report.

Around two million people, mostly in developing nations, die from neglected zoonotic diseases every year. These outbreaks not only cause severe illness and deaths, but also result in major economic losses for some of the world's poorest.

In the last two decades alone, zoonotic diseases have caused economic losses of more than \$100 billion. This does not include the cost of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is expected to reach \$9 trillion over the next few years, said the report.

**Also read:** [Kerala's battle against zoonotic diseases](#)

Most efforts to control zoonotic diseases have been reactive rather than proactive, say experts. They want governments to invest in public health, farm sustainability, end over-exploitation of wildlife and reduce climate change.

## Restructuring our food system for a healthy world

Africa — home to a large portion of the worlds remaining intact rainforests as well as fast-growing human population — is at high risk of the increased emergence of zoonotic diseases - but could also provide solutions, said experts.

“The situation on the continent today is ripe for intensifying existing zoonotic diseases and facilitating the emergence and spread of new ones,” said ILRI Director General Jimmy Smith. “But with their experiences with Ebola and other emerging diseases, African countries are demonstrating proactive ways to manage disease outbreaks.”

He said some African nations had adopted a “One Health” approach - uniting public health, veterinary and environmental expertise which can help to identify and treat outbreaks in animals before they pass to humans.

The experts urged governments to provide incentives for sustainable land use and animal husbandry and to develop strategies for producing food that do not rely on the destruction of habitats and biodiversity.

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