

Abstract 1: The Global Initiative on Children's Environmental Health Indicators (CEHI)

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Children's ability to develop and become productive adults is largely determined by their earliest experiences in their families and communities. Children may be exposed to environmental threats that seriously affect their health: over 40% of the global burden of disease attributed to environmental risk factors falls on children under five years of age, who account for only about 10% of the world's population. Ultimately, creating healthier environments will have a demonstrable impact on children's health and well-being. Therefore, improving children's environmental health presents an essential contribution towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goal to reduce child mortality (Goal 4).

Protecting children from exposure to environmental hazards requires that we better understand the relationship between environmental conditions and health outcomes. One way of providing information on the specific link between environment and health is through the use of indicators. These aim to provide a basis for assessing environmental risks to children's health, to prioritize policy and to reduce environmental risks for children.

A Global Initiative on Children's Environmental Health Indicators (CEHI) was launched at the WSSD in September 2002 and the global response to the launch demonstrates that many countries are supportive of this effort which is currently being implemented through a series of regional pilots in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East, North America and initiated in Africa. CEHI proceeds as an independent effort but is closely coordinated with HECA, as well as other WHO activities on children's environmental health, such as the preparation of national children's environmental health profiles and the Health and Environment Linkages Initiative (HELI) activities.