



Quality Assurance in COVID-19 Crisis Response: Environment and Climate Action

What are the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis for environment and climate?

Links between Covid-19 and environment and climate action are complex and at various levels. On the one hand direct impacts on the environment and climate, like in the case of increased amounts of hazardous and medical waste are obvious, on the other hand the links with on-going environmental degradation and the climate emergency increase the risk for future pandemics and compounded disasters.

- **Zoonotic diseases:** Coronaviruses are zoonotic, meaning they are transmitted between animals and people. Zoonotic diseases account for seventy-five percent of all emerging infectious diseases. Changes in land use, habitat loss and ecosystem degradation that bring wildlife, livestock and humans in closer contact with each other facilitate the spread of diseases, including new strains of bacteria and viruses. Meanwhile, illegal and uncontrolled trade of live wild animals creates dangerous opportunities for contact between humans and the diseases these animals carry.
- **Waste management:** During an outbreak, many types of additional medical and hazardous waste are generated, including infected masks, gloves and other protective equipment. Unsound management of this waste could cause unforeseen “knock-on” effects on human health and the environment. The safe handling, and final disposal of this waste is therefore a vital element in an effective emergency response.
- **Environmental health:** Environmental factors are also linked directly to the virulence and severity of COVID-19. Several studies have shown that COVID-19 mortality rates correlate positively with levels of air pollution. Already the leading cause of death in the world, killing 5 million people annually, reducing air pollution gains further urgency and relevance in the current context. Likewise, the provision of safe water, sanitation and hygienic conditions is essential to protecting human health during all infectious disease outbreaks, including the COVID-19 outbreak.
- **Compound disasters:** While COVID -19 disproportionately affects vulnerable and marginalized groups, many developing countries will also endure climate change-driven natural disasters during the pandemic period and beyond, creating compound disasters. The combination of the COVID-19 and climate crises dramatically multiplies the risks to vulnerable communities.

- **Green recovery:** Greening the recovery efforts and applying build-back-better approaches can increase resilience to future crises by ensuring a healthy environment that backs healthy people. Short-term recovery efforts will only provide value for money if they are aligned with long-term sustainability in a systematic way, across different actors and areas of action.

What measures can we take to ensure adequate consideration of environment and climate into response efforts?

- Raise the linkages between the Coronavirus crisis, the environment and climate change in donor coordination and dialogue with partner countries
- Ensure that negative environmental impacts e.g. related to hazardous waste are addressed in environmental and climate risk assessments and respective risk management measures are included in COVID-19 response measures.
- Ensure that interventions in the health sector and beyond also include environmental health considerations and in the long run also tackle the underlying root causes for zoonotic diseases related to biodiversity loss and land use changes.
- Support the integration of biological hazards like pandemics into national disaster risk reduction strategies and development planning and programming also with a view to facilitate joint responses to multi-hazard disasters.
- Make sure that resilience building against COVID-19, e.g. the expansion of social protection schemes, focusses on increasing resilience to all future shocks including climate induced disasters to ensure they continue to provide protection beyond the pandemic period.
- Ensure that environment and climate are well integrated into support measures for recovery funding to support the transition to low carbon and resilient development pathways and to avoid lock-in effects from unsustainable short-term recovery efforts.

Some key resources

[From containment to recovery: Environmental responses to the COVID-19 pandemic; OECD 2020.](#)

[COVID-19 updates from the United Nations Environment Programme; UNEP 2020.](#)

[Environmental Emergency Centre COVID-19 updates](#)

[Humanitarian Response to COVID-19 and the Environment - Operational Guidance Overview; Global Shelter Cluster Environment Community of Practice in collaboration with the UNEP/OCHA Joint Environment Unit and the Global Plan of Action for Sustainable Energy in Displacement Settings, 2020.](#)

[Geneva Environment Network has collected links related to environment, climate change and COVID-19](#)

[Thinking ahead: For a sustainable recovery from COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\), The World Bank 2020.](#)

[Greening the recovery. IMF 2020.](#)