



**Note for the press EURO/03/05
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Young people to have a voice in plans to protect their health from environmental hazards

At the first meeting of the new European Environment and Health Committee (EEHC), which took place in Paris this week, it was agreed that young people would be represented on the Committee, which drives the environment and health process. The EEHC has the task of ensuring that every WHO European Member State fulfils the commitments made in Budapest in June 2004, at the Fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, to reduce the exposure of children and young people to environmental hazards. Young people participated in the Budapest Conference as part of official delegations and through a “youth parliament”, and they presented their own Declaration in support.

The EEHC is a unique body whose members comprise representatives of health and environment ministries and of intergovernmental and civil society organizations. The EEHC’s mandate is to oversee and support Member States in putting measures into place to improve environmental hazards that have an impact on health. At the Paris meeting, a special task force was set up to support implementation of the Children’s Environment and Health Action Plan, endorsed in Budapest along with the Declaration.

The newly elected Chairman of the EEHC is Professor William Dab, Chief Medical Officer of France, who has a distinguished background in public health research and policy-making. France recently launched its own environment and health action plan, which includes measures that specifically address children’s health.

Causal relationships between environmental factors and disease have long been established. Research supported by WHO, and published in the *Lancet* on 19 June 2004, provided for the first time comparable data measuring the magnitude of the threat to children. Four factors linked to the environment were addressed: air pollution, water and sanitation, lead, and injuries. It was found that in the WHO European Region these factors are responsible for 100 000 deaths and 6 million years of healthy life lost every year among children and adolescents up to the age of 19 years. This accounts for 34% of deaths from all causes and 25% of healthy lives lost from all causes in this age group.

Environment and health issues continue to cause public concern and have hit the headlines in the European media in the last few months. It was confirmed at the first EEHC meeting that many countries were already working on new policies and plans to address these concerns and implement the commitments of the Budapest Conference. For more on the European environment and health process, please go to www.euro.who.int/budapest2004.

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