



Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, Protecting children's health in a changing environment", Parma, Italy, 10-12 March 2010

Side event symposium organized by the European Respiratory Society, ERS

Environmental influences on children's respiratory health

10 March, 10.45-12.15, Donizetti meeting room, Parma Municipality Congress Centre, Parma Municipality Congress Centre, Viale Barilla 29/a, 43100 Parma.

INFORMATION RELEASE

Lung health under threat from climate change and deteriorating air quality

Parma, Italy 10 March 2010 – Environmental health and medical experts are calling for more attention to be given to respiratory disease (1) at a symposium during the Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health today in Parma, Italy, as part of the 2010 Year of the Lung activities.

"Unless we act NOW, one in six premature deaths worldwide will be caused by lung disease by 2020," says Prof. Nikos Siafakas, ERS President, and Coordinator of the 2010 Year of the Lung campaign, European Region. "We are here today to provide recommendations on the necessary research and policy actions to reverse this trend in Europe." (2)

People with respiratory problems will be hit particularly hard by temperature increases and poor air quality associated with global warming, according to the European Respiratory Society and the Health and Environment Alliance, leading organisations with expertise in environment and health. Recent scientific evidence shows that the risk of premature death among respiratory patients is up to six times higher than in the rest of the population for every one degree Celsius rise in temperature. (3)

Outdoor and indoor air pollutants are other concerns. Everyone living in a city is exposed to outdoor air pollution to some extent, and even low dose exposure can be harmful to health. The most prevalent problem for indoor air quality is still environmental tobacco smoke but concerns extend to other sources of indoor air pollution, such as various consumer products (air fresheners) and building materials, further aggravated by problems of dampness and mould. As households in Europe and elsewhere endeavour to make their homes more air tight in an attempt to reduce energy costs, opportunities for ventilating indoor spaces decline and exposure to indoor air pollutants increases.

The symposium today will review these and other factors so that research gaps and policy recommendations can be defined.

Isabella Annesi-Maesano of the European Respiratory Society, who will be speaking at the symposium, says: "We need to increase awareness of these problems, boost research capacity, and introduce the health-friendly policies that can make a difference to adults and children's lives. For example, on outdoor air policy, specific public level decisions can be taken to reduce emissions and thus reduce children's exposure."

Italian Dr Gennaro D'Amato will speak on behalf of the European Respiratory Society on "Emerging future threats due to climatic change factors". The European Respiratory Society would like to see more funds allocated to research on children's respiratory health. While the impact of climate change on older people, and the particularly serious effects on people with respiratory diseases, are known, no similar research has been done for the impact on children. Such research is urgently needed because children absorb proportionately more than adults from each breath they take.

The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) is calling for a strong stance from the European Union on targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. A report commissioned by HEAL and others shows that the cleaner air associated with climate change policies can reduce hospital admissions and premature deaths representing future savings to society and health systems of up to 25 billion Euros per year in monetary terms. (4)

"We believe that both a 40% reduction target on carbon emissions in the EU and urgent implementation of the WHO guidelines on air quality are needed to protect respiratory health," says Anne Stauffer, Policy Coordinator at HEAL, who will also be speaking at the Symposium in Parma.

Contacts:

Dr. Isabella Annesi-Maesano, Member European Respiratory Society Environment & Health committee, INSERM & UPMC, Medical School Pierre et Marie Curie, Paris, France. Email: annesimaesano@gmail.com.

Anne Stauffer, Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), E-mail: anne@env-health.org, Tel: +32 472 711092

Diana Smith, Communications, HEAL, E-mail: Diana@env-health.org. Tel: +33 6 33 04 2943.

Notes

1. Respiratory diseases include conditions such as asthma, respiratory tract infections, lung cancer and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).
2. **Year of the Lung:** The European Respiratory Society has joined with several other leading lung health organisations to launch the Year of the Lung in 2010. See www.2010yearofthelung.org **The 2010 Year of the Lung aims to:** increase awareness and action in lung health, call for health-friendly environment policies, and advocate for resources to improve diagnosis, treatment and care.
3. ERS Position Statement, Climate change and respiratory disease: European Respiratory Society position statement, J G Ayres et al, European Respiratory Journal 2009; 34: 295-302. The position paper is available at <http://erj.ersjournals.com/cgi/content/full/34/2/295>
4. The 25 billion Euro figure is taken from the "Co-benefits of stronger climate change policy" report. It was commissioned by HEAL, WWF and Climate Action Network Europe. It is available at http://www.env-health.org/IMG/pdf/Co-benefits_to_health_report_-_september_2008.pdf

*The **European Respiratory Society (ERS)** is a professional, medical organisation with more than 10,000 members in over 100 countries representing medical and scientific experts in the field of respiratory medicine and lung science. Its mission is to promote lung health through research, knowledge sharing and medical education. Website: www.ersnet.org*

***Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)** aims to raise awareness of how environmental protection and sustainability improves health and to empower the health community to contribute their expertise to policy making. Since its inception, HEAL's membership has grown to include a diverse network of more than 60 citizens', patients', women's, health professionals' and environmental organizations across Europe which together have a strong track record in increasing public and expert engagement in both EU debate and the decision-making process. Website: www.env-health.org*