

United Kingdom



KEY FACTS:

- ◆ Capital: London
- ◆ Population: 60,769,000 (2007)
- ◆ GDP growth: 2.5% p.a. 1990–2005
- ◆ Official language: English
- ◆ Time: GMT plus 0–1hr
- ◆ Currency: pound sterling (£)

Current vulnerabilities and threats

1. What are the health risks from current or future climate change impacts that are of most concern to your country?

- ◆ The predictions for the UK are mainly hotter, drier summers and warmer, wetter winters. The Department of Health (DH)/Health Protection Agency (HPA) *Report Health Effects of Climate Change in the UK 2008* published in February 2008, outlined the potential health effects for the UK. These are:
 - More frequent heat waves (heat stroke /dehydration etc).
 - Flooding (mental health stress/public health concerns).
 - Increased incidence of:
 - vector-borne disease;
 - tick-borne disease;
 - food-borne disease;
 - water-borne disease.
 - Air pollution, ozone (cardiovascular/respiratory).
 - Increased UV exposure (sunburn, skin cancers).
 - Global migration and impacts on the health service capacity.

2. What population groups in your country are most vulnerable to the health impacts of climate change and what are the impacts likely to be?

- ◆ The elderly, the young, chronically ill and poor/homeless are more vulnerable.
- ◆ United States experience of heat waves suggest that these impact most on homeless and poor elderly people living in urban areas.
- ◆ The heat wave affecting Europe in 2003 caused a large number of premature deaths (30,000+), due to heat effects including cardiovascular and respiratory effects.

Strategy and policy

3. How much of a priority is addressing the impacts of climate change on health for your country?

High priority.

4. Please describe the strategies your country has developed (for example, health and climate change adaptation strategies) that address the health impacts of climate change.

The Department of Health's priorities for adaptation policies are:

- ◆ to ensure that national and local adaptation plans exist for the

expected health impacts from climate change, and that these plans are fully implemented, with regular evaluation to ensure they remain effective;

- ◆ to increase awareness amongst the public and the medical profession of the health impacts of climate change, and what to do to reduce and adapt to them;
- ◆ adapting the health and social care infrastructure (hospitals, nursing homes) to be more resilient to the effects of climate change.

These are part of a wider Government Climate Change Adaptation Programme (see <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/climatechange/dapt/programme/>)

These are some of the measures that the Department of Health has already put in place:

- ◆ A National Heatwave Plan.
- ◆ DH produced guidance with the HPA and from its Health Emergency Preparedness Division on dealing with disruptive challenges and managing incidents including flooding.
- ◆ Measures to raise awareness among health professionals: http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_082690
- ◆ Other measures in place address mitigation aspects of climate change, such as the NHS Energy Targets and NHS Carbon Reduction Strategy.

5. The health been integrated into national climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies?

Yes.

6. What steps have been made towards implementation of these strategies?

On heatwaves:

- ◆ DH developed a National Plan, which was first launched in 2004 and is updated yearly based upon the latest available evidence. This contains guidance for the health and social care sector on protecting vulnerable people from the effects of heat and on how local authorities can keep urban areas cool. A traffic light 'Heat-Health Watch' system operates in England during the summer months. http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh

/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_084913.pdf

On flooding:

- ◆ DH recently issued NHS Business Continuity Management guidance provides trusts with guidance on how to complete business impact analysis to help mitigate against risks;
- ◆ The Department is also working to meet the recommendations in the 'Pitt Review', following specific information on the flooding in the summer 2007, which can be found at; <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/thepittreview.aspx>

On raising awareness:

- ◆ A new public health workforce initiative (Climate Connection) to address climate change was launched. The Climate Connection is tasked with creating a new vision of the role for public health in tackling climate change, equipping the profession to take action on both reducing emissions and on preparing for climate change. The national event brought together public health leaders and educators with professionals from housing, transport, town planning and other sectors. The aim is to map out a joined-up response to the expected climatic changes with a series of regional workshops for public health practitioners.

Mitigation strategies:

- ◆ The NHS is working towards mandatory energy and carbon efficiency targets (from 2000 to 2010) and key performance indicators [of 35-55 gigajoules per 100 cubic meters (Gj/100m³) for new capital build developments and refurbishments, and [55-65 Gj/100m³ for] the existing operational estate. £100m has been allocated to help trusts achieve these targets;
- ◆ The NHS Carbon Reduction Strategy was launched in January 2009 and sets out ways that these reduction targets can be achieved. The plans actually cover many aspects of patients' care, from building design to transport, waste, food, water and energy use.

7. What are the current policy gaps in addressing climate change and health?

- ◆ These are currently being scoped with the help of stakeholders.
- ◆ Current research that has been commissioned looks at the health co-benefits of adaptation and mitigation policies.

8. How well equipped is your health system to cope with the impacts of climate change?

Fairly well equipped so far, though the expected increased frequency of extreme weather events will stress the system.

9. Have you made any changes to your health system in response to increased risks resulting from climate change and if so, what changes have you made?

- ◆ System changes already in process for heat wave and flooding events.
- ◆ Infrastructure changes currently being considered. Energy and procurement efficiencies already being made. Building regulations currently under review.

10. What are the main constraints to addressing the health impacts of climate change in your country and how will these be addressed?

Lack of awareness and sense of urgency.

11. Have national resources been allocated to address climate change and health in your country? If so, approximately how much has been allocated and for what issues?

- ◆ A cross-Government Programme is in place, with national resources allocated.

12. Is the Ministry of Health working together with other ministries (such as Ministries of Agriculture, Environment, Fisheries or Finance) to address health and climate change issues?

Yes.

13. Has your country been involved in work to manage climate change and health at the international level?

- ◆ The UK's request for a resolution on "climate change and health" was accepted by the World Health Executive Board and agreed at the World Health Assembly in May 2008. Its aim is to raise awareness of the health implications of climate change among health ministries and professionals and promote practical and sustainable action nationally and internationally to respond to these.
- ◆ The UK now co-chairs the drafting group for a WHO-European Framework for Action on Climate Change.

14. How would you describe the capacity of your country to participate at the global level on climate change and health?

- ◆ The Department of Health is currently working at maximum capacity, with WHO and other leading countries on the implementation of the 'climate change and health' resolution. The WHO's action plan for implementation was agreed by the WHO Executive Board recently (21 Jan 09).
- ◆ Along with other WHO Regions, the WHO European Region is working on a climate change strategy/framework for action. The UK co-chairs this drafting group. The first draft was discussed at the European Environment & Health Committee's meeting in Luxembourg (in February 2009) resulting in an inclusion of this issue in the draft Ministerial Declaration for 2010.

Any other comments or information you would like to provide

Most of the information can be found on:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/climatechange/adapt/programme/doh.htm> in Department of Health programme