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Traditional Hazards, New Risks

"The problems we have today cannot be solved by thinking the way we thought when we created them."
Albert Einstein (1879–1955)

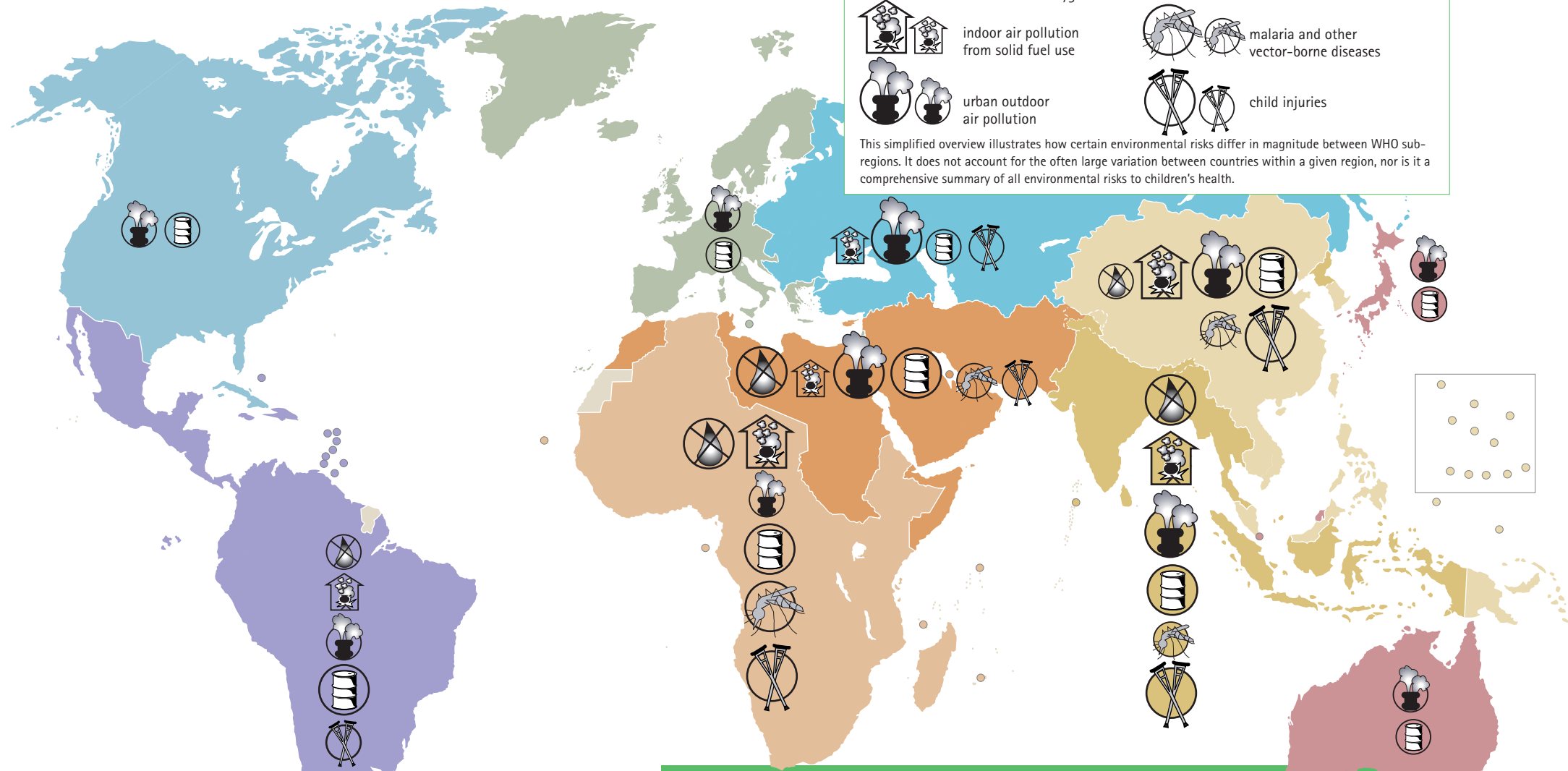
Children today live in an environment that is vastly different from that of a few generations ago. Global challenges include industrialization, rapid urban population growth, the unsustainable consumption of natural resources, the increasing production and use of chemicals, and the movement of hazardous wastes across national borders.

Homes, schools, streets and fields – the settings where children live, learn, play and work – all present environmental hazards. Yet, children born into different countries, cities or rural areas, and even different neighbourhoods, face risks that may be poles apart.

As countries develop, many of the most serious "basic risks" to child health gradually vanish with improvements in water and sanitation, hygiene and cleaner fuels for cooking. Their decline, however, is accompanied by an increase in "modern risks". Industrialization brings with it an increase in road traffic, air pollution, and the use of chemicals that infiltrate the air children breathe and the food they eat.

It is too early to judge the exact impact of "emerging risks", such as endocrine disruptors and global warming. These add to the challenges we must confront to safeguard our children's health and future.

Each year over three million children die from illnesses and other conditions caused by environmental hazards.



Environmental health risks

Sized according to significance of risk 2002 by WHO sub-region

- lack of safe water, sanitation and hygiene
- indoor air pollution from solid fuel use
- urban outdoor air pollution
- lead and other hazardous chemicals
- malaria and other vector-borne diseases
- child injuries

This simplified overview illustrates how certain environmental risks differ in magnitude between WHO sub-regions. It does not account for the often large variation between countries within a given region, nor is it a comprehensive summary of all environmental risks to children's health.

