



Making a Difference:
Indicators to Improve Children's
Environmental Health



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Indicators to Improve Children's Environmental Health

Prepared on behalf of the World Health Organization

by

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PREFACE

Over the last ten years considerable effort has been devoted to developing environmental health indicators to support policy. In only a few cases, however, can the material effects of these indicators, in terms of reduced health inequalities or mortality rates, be seen. In many cases, this is because the problems are intractable and complex. Long latency times mean that it will take many years for the effects of interventions to become detectable. In other cases, it is because the indicators themselves have not been especially relevant or applicable.

Recognition is now growing that our first priority should be the very young, not only because they are often the most vulnerable and least able to help themselves, but also because it is often the events that happen in the early years that shape the rest of their lives. Early intervention can thus have lifelong benefits.

Early intervention, however, requires rapid recognition of what needs to be done, followed by quick and targeted action. In this context the need for effective indicators becomes all the more acute. The purpose of this report is to lay the foundation for developing and implementing these indicators as a basis for priority setting and action.

The report does two things. It discusses and describes some of the principles that need to be considered in developing effective environmental health indicators for children. It then applies these to produce a set of indicators, targeted at the main disease burdens that affect children globally (CD-ROM).

The indicators presented here are intended to serve several purposes. Amongst others, these include:

- providing a basis for assessing environmental risks to children's health, in order to help prioritize policy at national and global level;
- acting as a basis for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of national and international initiatives to reduce environmental health risks for children;
- providing a template for developing other indicators as needed to address issues of specific local or national concern.



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