

Environment and Health

order in children and adolescents in Germany. One in five children and one in three adolescents weigh too much, and as many as seven to eight percent are severely overweight. A balanced, healthy diet and adequate exercise reduce the risk of nutrition-related health disorders. Nutritional education campaigns help to prevent overweight.

Environment-oriented health protection must start directly in the community. At a local level there is a special need for action aimed at developing an environment conducive to health, such as a healthy home environment, adequate recreation areas, play grounds for children, or reductions in traffic and noise levels. The Action Programme Environment and Health supports measures for environment-oriented health protection at the local authority level.

Health risks - registering, assessing, communicating

More and more people are suffering from health disorders which they themselves often believe to have environmental causes. The Action Programme supports environmental medicine research projects and activities aimed at quality assurance in environmental medicine in order to improve health access and health care for persons affected.

In most cases joint analysis of environmental data and health data currently available is not possible. This makes it difficult to arrive at an appropriate assessment of environmental influences on health, in other words an assessment that neither exaggerates nor understates the connections. Research projects seek to indicate ways of improving procedures and methods for assessing environment-related health risks.

Acceptance of measures to protect health and the environment depends on soundly based and reproducible evaluation of risks and on careful consideration of the economic and social benefits of the activities that cause the environmental stresses. A precautionary environmental policy must provide instruments that permit timely identification, assessment and evaluation of health risks and must communicate the risks and the measures planned. The Action Programme Environment and Health seeks to help achieve this.

In order to meet the need for easily understood information about the health effects of environmental influences and products and to support precautionary attitudes in the general public, the ministries and superior federal authorities taking part in the Action Programme Environment and Health are stepping up their public relations work on environment-related health risks.

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In short:

People need an environment in which they can live a healthy life. To support this objective, several ministries and higher federal authorities are working together in the Action Programme Environment and Health. This promotes research projects and information campaigns in the fields of environmental protection, health protection and consumer protection. Children and adolescents are a special focus.

The Action Programme's message is: Environment and health go together - environmental protection is a sustainable precautionary health policy.

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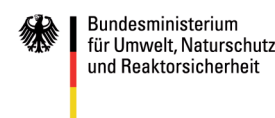
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Action Programme Environment and Health Germany

“Every individual is entitled to an environment conducive to the highest attainable level of health and wellbeing”

(From the “European Charter on Environment and Health”, 1989)



The Action Programme Environment and Health is a joint programme of these federal ministries and superior federal authorities

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The Action Programme Environment and Health in Germany

Environmental influences, e.g. due to pollutants, radiation or noise, can adversely affect the health and well-being of individuals. This is the reason for the joint Action Programme Environment and Health (German acronym: APUG) presented to the public in June 1999 by the Federal Health Ministry and the Federal Environment Ministry. Since autumn 2002 the Federal Consumer Protection Ministry has also been involved.

Scientific back-up for the Action Programme is provided by four superior federal authorities: the Federal Office for Radiation Protection, the Federal Institute for Risk Assessment, the Robert Koch-Institute and the Federal Environmental Agency. The APUG-Secretariat is located at the Federal Environmental Agency.

The purpose of the Action Programme is to forge closer links between environmental protection and health protection and thereby provide improved protection of health against environmental influences. The various activities are financed by funds provided by the participating ministries and superior federal authorities. A special focus in the Action Programme is health protection for children and adolescents.

The key areas of the Action Programme Environment and Health

Information: The public is to be provided with more information about environmental health risks and healthy eating habits.

Research: Research projects examining the exposure and sensitivity of children and adolescents to pollutants, for example, or chemical and biological pollution of indoor environments or aspects of noise, radiation and environmental medicine, are in progress to study environmentally induced health risks and ensure even better protection of children, adolescents and adults from health risks arising from environmental influences.

Children and adolescents: Children and adolescents may display particularly sensitive reactions to certain environmental influences. The growing body therefore requires special concern. Measures that protect children also help protect the population as a whole. In this sense the Action Programme supports a policy of sustainable development.

International integration of the Action Programme

The German Action Programme Environment and Health is integrated in the European process for environment and health. The First European Conference on "Environment and Health", initiated by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and held in Frankfurt am Main in 1989, approved the "European Charter on Environment and Health". This charter states:

Environment and Health

"Every individual is entitled to an environment conducive to the highest attainable level of health and wellbeing."

The Charter forms the basis for a health-oriented environmental policy. The European WHO Conferences on Environment and Health are held at regular intervals. The German Action Programme Environment and Health was presented at the Third Conference, held in London in 1999.

Environmental protection is sustainable precautionary health policy

In Germany statutory provisions have led to improvements in the quality of the environment and have done much to protect human health. These days, atmospheric pollution such as lead and sulphur emissions and their health impacts play a minor role. Instead, other risk factors have come to the fore: chemicals, pollutant-contaminated products and foods, noise, dust, ozone, UV radiation or high-frequency electromagnetic radiation. Environmental factors influence chronic and complex syndromes such as asthma and allergies.

The aim of state health and environment policy is to undertake increased research into interrelationships in the "environment and health" complex and to promote action based on the precautionary principle. Environmental factors hazardous to health are to be identified in good time and assessed scientifically. Strategic and specific ways and means of preventing and controlling environment-related health problems are to be developed and implemented.

Environmental policy protects and benefits mankind and supports a sustainable precautionary health policy. The Action Programme Environment and Health helps to achieve this.

Children - environment and health

Children are our future. They are tomorrow's society. Protecting them is an important task. The aim is to create a sustainable - "grandchildren-friendly" - future in which children can live without health risks due to environmental influences.

Over the past decades, the spectrum of diseases in childhood and adolescence has changed. In the industrialized countries, infectious diseases have fallen sharply. Overweight is increasing as a result of lack of exercise, incorrect diet and unhealthy eating habits. This favours the development of secondary health problems. Moreover, children and

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adolescents are exposed to the burdens of noise, stress and changes in their living environment. Chronic diseases are increasingly being seen as a problem. Many of these chronic diseases are influenced or caused by several factors at once.

The Action Programme Environment and Health therefore promotes the following:

Representative studies on the health and environment of children and adolescents in Germany. The results should create a reliable data base for taking effective action to prevent pollutant loads and thereby promote the health of the next generation (German Environmental Survey for Children).

Studies of children's sensitivity to pollutants. In order to take better care for children when fixing threshold and guide values, various projects are run to investigate environment-related health risks to children.

A health conscious and environmentally aware way of life. This should be supported by public relations and information work with information on health risks, e.g. in the home, or on products, food and radiation.

Living a healthy and environmentally aware life

People in Central Europe spend about 80 to 90% of their life indoors: at home, at work, in transport facilities such as car, bus and train. The air inside these rooms may be more heavily polluted than ambient air in a big city. Pollutant-free indoor air is very important for human health and well-being. The Action Programme Environment and Health promotes projects that inform the public about health risks due to polluted indoor air and help to identify and eliminate causes of pollution.

Noise can also become a health risk. It is one of the most strongly perceived environmental impairments. More than two thirds of all people in Germany find traffic noise or leisure noise a nuisance. The Action Programme includes research into the effects of noise on health and investigates ways and means of developing greater public awareness and understanding of health risks due to noise.

People are exposed to various kinds of radiation. The Action Programme Environment and Health supports programmes of research to provide protection against UV radiation, high-frequency electromagnetic radiation (e.g. mobile phones) and natural radioactivity (e.g. radon in buildings) and consequential measures.

Food is also an important factor for health, well-being and a contented life. Overweight is the most common nutritional dis-