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World Health Day 2003: healthy environments for children.

## Unhealthy environments kill 5 million children a year

“It is a little known but devastating fact that every year over 5 million children aged between 0 and 14 die, mainly in the developing world, from diseases related to their environments — the places where they live, learn and play,” said WHO’s Director-General, Gro Harlem Brundtland, at the ceremony to mark World Health Day in New Delhi, India.

World Health Day, 7 April 2003, was devoted to “Healthy environments for children”. WHO used the occasion to urge United Nations and other agencies to do more to reduce the environmental hazards children face. These include unsafe drinking-water, poor sanitation, disease vectors, air pollution, chemical hazards and unintentional injuries. Acute respiratory infections, malaria, diarrhoea and accidents are the major causes of death in childhood, and they can be drastically reduced by simple environmental improvements.

Among the simple measures that have the power to prevent illness and save lives are hand-washing with soap; safe sanitary facilities; clean water storage, and treatment where necessary; ventilation in the home; use of insecticide-treated nets; and road safety.

The Healthy Environments for Children Alliance was launched in 2002 in Johannesburg, at the World Summit for Sustainable Development.