

Medicine

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Are countries doing enough to reduce the negative effects of unhealthy environments on children? Preparations are now under way for an intergovernmental review, to take place on 13–15 June in Vienna, Austria. Countries in the WHO European Region will assess their progress in implementing the commitments that they made in the Children's Environment and Health Action Plan for Europe (CEHAPE), adopted at the Fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health in 2004.

This week, Member States set the agenda for the Vienna review at the twenty-third meeting of the European Environment and Health Committee (EEHC) in Brussels, Belgium. In addition, Member States and stakeholders discussed the latest developments in organizing the review and made decisions on how to carry forward the European environment and health process.

The role of young people in the decision-making process was one of the key elements of the discussion. Since 2004, young people have been involved at a number of important stages in the implementation of countries' commitments. A youth workshop to review the progress made on environmental policy and to discuss future plans will take place in Luxembourg on 23–25 March 2007.

Hosting the EEHC meeting, the Belgian federal government expressed its support for enhanced cooperation on environmental and health issues and their impact on children's health. It recognized the vital role of the WHO Regional Office for Europe as an intergovernmental organization that can improve countries' understanding of the impact of a damaging environment on children's health, and help set the international agenda. In their National Environment and Health Action Plan (NEHAP), Belgian authorities announced their intention to launch a pilot project to improve the quality of indoor air in daycare centres.

Environment and health: a continuing priority

The environments in which people live remain a major influence on their health. In the WHO European Region, children and young people are paying the highest price, with 100 000 people aged under 19 years dying every year owing to injuries and environmental factors.

Further information on the Belgian authorities' commitments is available on the web site of the Belgian NEHAP (<http://www.nehap.be>). The WHO Regional Office for Europe web site offers further information on the EEHC (<http://www.euro.who.int/eehc>) and the CEHAPE (<http://www.euro.who.int/document/e83338.pdf>).