

SATURDAY, 1 FEBRUARY 2020
PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCIES



Time for WHO to declare climate change a public health emergency of international concern

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"Planet Earth is facing a climate emergency"
World Scientists' Warning of a Climate Emergency. 2019. BioScience

Martin Ollman Photography





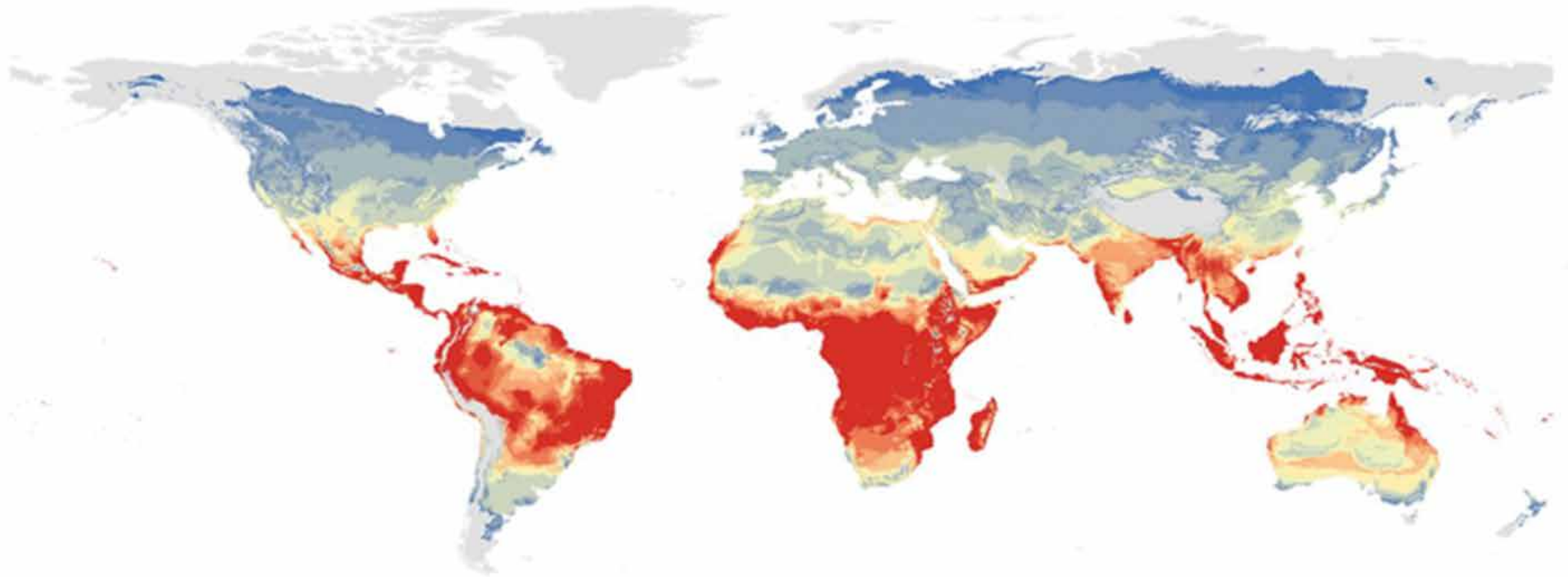
“A swarm capable consuming the same amount of food in one day as 85 million people” (FAO, Jan. 2020)

2080

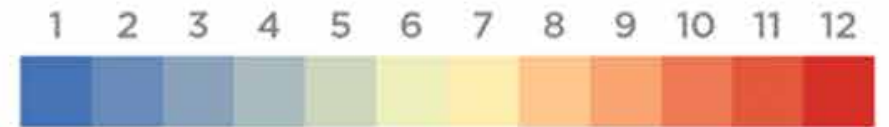
Mosquito Habitat: Current & Projected

(Ryan et al, 2019)

THIS PROJECTION IS BASED ON A WORST-CASE SCENARIO WITH THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE UNMITIGATED.



Number of months per year when disease transmission by *Aedes aegypti* mosquito is possible



“Climate change is the greatest challenge of the 21st century, threatening human health and development. The longer we delay action, the greater the risks to human lives and health.”
(2018)

<https://www.who.int/news-room/facts-in-pictures/detail/health-and-climate-change>

WHA 2019: Urge in opening - and other sessions for WHO to recognize and declare a planetary emergency

WHO's response could and should be to use the **authority** it derives from both its **constitution** and the **IHR** to "declare **climate change a Public Health Emergency of International Concern**"

"Foster the ability to **live harmoniously** in a changing **total environment**" (preamble, constitution)

"Take **emergency measures** within the **functions** and **financial resources** of the organisation to deal with events **requiring immediate action**" (art.28, constitution)

IHR incorporates 'multi-hazard' perspective on health emergencies including range of public health events..resulting from conflict, technological, hazard, and natural disasters

A PHEIC is "an extraordinary event which is determined... to constitute a public health risk to other states through the international spread of disease"

Event means "a manifestation of disease" or an occurrence that creates a "potential for disease"

In practice the declaration of a PHEIC has been, and continues to be, restricted to infectious disease outbreaks

Box 1: Step-wise approach to determining an event a PHEIC

“In determining whether an event constitutes a public health emergency of international concern, the Director-General shall consider:

- A. information provided by the State Party;
- B. the decision instrument contained in Annex 2;
- C. the advice of the Emergency Committee;
- D. scientific principles as well as the available scientific evidence and other relevant information; and
- E. an assessment of the risk to human health, of the risk of international spread of disease and of the risk of interference with international traffic”.

Article 12(4) International Health Regulations, 2005.

EVENTS DETECTED BY NATIONAL SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM

YES

Any event of potential international public health concern, including those of unknown causes or sources and those involving other events or diseases than those listed in the box on the left and the box on the right shall lead to utilization of the algorithm.

YES

Is the public health impact of the event serious?

YES

Is the event unusual or unexpected?

YES



NO



Is there a significant risk of international spread?

YES

EVENT SHALL BE NOTIFIED TO WHO UNDER THE INTERNATIONAL HEALTH REGULATIONS

Policy space for WHO

- “Provide **further assistance** to the State Party, including ...the **adequacy of control measures.**” (art.13, IHR)
- Investing in **health systems resilience** to climate variability and change (A72/16)
- WHO **global strategy on health, environment and climate change** (A72/15)
- WHO facilitates **climate and health** sessions in **CoP UNFCCC** climate meetings
- Focus on **air pollution** (EB146/7)
- impact JEEs and NAPHS on **IHR core capacities** is still **unclear** (EB146/16)
- **Public health preparedness** and response (EB146/17) **≠ Climate Change**
- **Review** of the **language and definition** used to define a health emergency
- WHO should convene “**review conferences**” of the IHR (Katz, 2019)
- “**Healthy development of the child** is of basic importance” (WHO constitution)
- ...but Member States provide **diplomatic firewall!** PHEIC would impact the **Common But Differentiated Responsibilities** mechanism of UNFCCC



“Step out of our comfort zone to make this a **turning point** in our history”

WHO could provide a strong signal:

If ever there was a **public health emergency of international concern**, it is this!



Rubber REPUBLIC★

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