

# Deforestation in Cambodia linked to higher risk of ill health in young children

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Researchers from the National University of Singapore (NUS) have found that the loss of dense forest in Cambodia was associated with higher risk of diarrhoea, acute respiratory infection, and fever – which are major sources of global childhood morbidity and mortality – in children younger than five years old.

Led by Assistant Professor Roman Carrasco from the Department of Biological Sciences at the NUS Faculty of Science, the team analysed [health](#) survey data from 35,547 households in 1,766 communities between 2005 and 2014, to investigate the relationship between child health and protected areas across different forest types in Cambodia.

Mr Thomas Pienkowski, who is the first author of the study, said, "Currently, there are limited studies on the health benefits that forests may provide. Most research looking at the impact of deforestation on health focuses on single diseases, thus making it challenging to integrate into policy. Furthermore, it is unclear how these environmental threats can be mitigated, and if conservation tools such as protected areas can play a role."

The NUS team found that 10 per cent reduction in dense forest is associated with 14 percent increase in the incidence of diarrhoea in children younger than five years old. In addition, the team's findings showed that an increase in protected area cover was associated with lower risk of diarrhoea and [acute respiratory infection](#).

"In this study, we showed that deforestation in Cambodia is associated with increased risk of leading causes of childhood mortality and morbidity. This highlights the link between environmental degradation and health, and suggests that conserving forests could help in mitigating health burden. Our findings suggest that public health impacts of deforestation should be accounted for when policy makers are assessing trade-offs in land use planning, and present new possibilities for simultaneous achievement of public health and conservation goals," said Asst Prof Carrasco.

Building on their findings, the NUS research team plans to expand the study to include regional analyses in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, to assess how the relationship between health and tropical [forest](#) conservation may change under different socioeconomic and environmental realities.

This study was published in the scientific journal *The Lancet Planetary Health* in August 2017.

**More information:** Thomas Pienkowski et al. Empirical evidence of the public health benefits of tropical forest conservation in Cambodia: a generalised linear mixed-effects model analysis, *The Lancet Planetary Health* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/S2542-5196\(17\)30081-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(17)30081-5)

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