

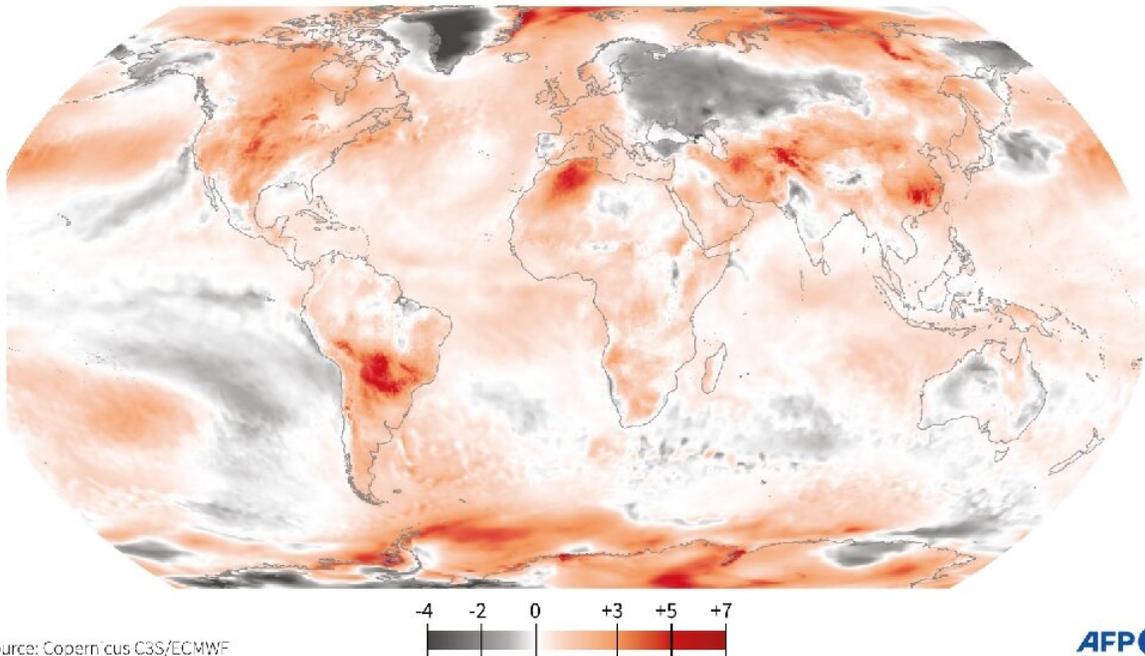
# WHO pens prescription for health at COP26

October 11 2021, by Robin Millard

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## The 4<sup>th</sup> warmest September on record globally

Variation compared to average September temperatures from 1921 to 2010 in °C



The 4th warmest September on record globally.

Millions of lives could be saved by reining in global warming, the World Health Organization said Monday, urging the COP26 summit to take serious climate action to improve public health worldwide.

"The burning of fossil fuels is killing us," the World Health Organization

said in an 82-page COP26 special report. "Climate change is the single biggest health threat facing humanity."

In the report, entitled "The Health Argument for Climate Action", the WHO set out 10 recommendations on how to maximise the [health benefits](#) of tackling climate change—and avoid the worst health impacts of the climate crisis.

Countries must set ambitious national climate commitments to foster a healthy recovery from the Covid-19 crisis, said the report.

"The Covid-19 pandemic has shone a light on the intimate and delicate links between humans, animals and our environment," said WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

"The same unsustainable choices that are killing our planet are killing people.

"WHO calls on all countries to commit to decisive action at COP26 to limit [global warming](#) to 1.5 degrees Celsius—not just because it's the right thing to do, but because it's in our own interests."

COP26, the UN Climate Change Conference, is being held in Glasgow from October 31 to November 12.

## **Death toll**

Achieving the goals of the 2015 Paris Agreement—which included preferably limiting the rise in mean global temperature to 1.5 C—would save millions of lives every year due to improvements in air quality, diet, and physical activity, said the report.

Air pollution, primarily the result of burning fossil fuels, caused 13

deaths per minute worldwide—and the [public health](#) benefits of ambitious [climate action](#) would far outweigh the costs.

"Bringing down air pollution to WHO guideline levels, for example, would reduce the total number of global deaths from air pollution by 80 percent," said Maria Neira, the WHO's environment, climate change and health director.

Switching to more plant-based diets "could reduce global emissions significantly, ensure more resilient food systems, and avoid up to 5.1 million diet-related deaths a year by 2050", she added.

The WHO's 10 recommendations urge COP negotiators to place health at the heart of the summit and commit to a green recovery from Covid-19.

The WHO wants climate interventions with the largest health gains prioritised, with health resilience to climate risks included in planning.

The report called a shift away from coal combustion to [renewable energy](#) as part of a move towards energy systems that improve health.

It also urged the redesign of urban environments to increase access to green space and for walking, cycling and public transport to be prioritised.

And it sent an [open letter](#) signed by organisations representing more than two thirds of the global health workforce urging leaders to step up climate action at Glasgow.

"We are already responding to the health harms caused by climate change," said the letter, penned by 300 organisations representing at least 45 million health professionals.

"Make human [health](#) and equity central to all [climate change](#) mitigation and adaptation actions," the joint letter said.

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