

Statement on the International Panel on Climate Change Report

Climate & Health Alliance

The conclusion of the Sixth report of the UN's International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is stark and unambiguous. The climate crisis engulfing the world is unequivocally caused by human activities and is affecting every corner of the planet's land, air, and sea already. It is clear in stating that human activity is changing the Earth's climate in unprecedented ways and some of these changes are now inevitable and irreversible.

The global community, including Ireland, has repeatedly ignored the warning of climate scientists over the past decades and now we are experiencing the devastating impact of this climate emergency in the form of rising temperatures, devastating floods, fiercer wildfires, and more searing and long-lasting droughts. These human-induced climate events will not only have an extremely damaging impact on the health of our planet but also human health, particularly those already most vulnerable.

Over the next two decades, temperatures are likely to rise by more than 1.5C above pre-industrial levels, bringing more of the widespread devastation and extreme weather events that we are currently seeing. Only by undertaking immediate rapid and drastic reductions in greenhouse gases in this decade can we prevent escalating this climate crisis. Continuing a trajectory of business as usual or embarking on minimal emission reductions will simply exacerbate this climate emergency and the associated human health impacts. Even limiting the heating to 2C will result in significantly more suffering for all life on Earth.

Planetary health and human health are inextricably interlinked but too often overlooked. Climate change affects the social and environmental determinants of health – clean air, safe drinking water, sufficient food, and secure shelter. Failure to act will have devastating health impacts for all of us. However, the positive news from the report is that keeping heating of the planet to 1.5C and limiting health-impacting climate events is still possible but only if “immediate, rapid, and large-scale reductions” takes place.

In Ireland, we have justifiably committed to an ambitious climate bill that seeks to halve carbon emissions by 2030 and to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. This is to be hugely welcomed. Nevertheless, this harrowing report only underlines the need for urgent action to meet the grand rhetoric. The Government and opposition must support and implement evidence-based measures immediately that will reduce our emissions to meet our targets and ensure a Just Transition.

Furthermore, the government must heed the advice of the report and make “strong, rapid and sustained reductions” in methane in addition to slashing carbon dioxide emissions. The report is clear that we will not be able to meet the 1.5C target without aggressive action methane emissions which will require the Irish agricultural sector to undergo rapid transformation to become more sustainable and this includes reductions in the herd size.

Climate change is the defining crisis of our times, and the IPCC report shows it is happening even more quickly than we ever feared. Inaction will lead to devastating health consequences for all of us. The Climate and Health Alliance is calling on the government to implement the necessary changes now and without delay to reduce our emissions to keep the planet within 1.5C.

The health of the planet and health of current and future human generations depends on it.

Climate & Health Alliance

Established in 2019, the Climate and Health Alliance is a broad alliance of public health NGO's, professional bodies, and academic institutions that share a common goal in advocating for urgent government action in addressing the issue of climate change, its direct impact on public health and the significant co-benefits which will accrue from climate action.

