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**Health risks of climate change: act now or pay later**

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There is growing scientific consensus that climate change is happening, is largely human induced, and will have serious consequences for human health. The impact of climate change on global health is probably not yet large, compared with major risk factors, but will become greater later in this century, especially if the world follows one of the so-called high-end emission pathways, such as Representative Concentration Pathway (RCP) 8·5, outlined in the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Fifth Assessment Report.1, 2

This emission pathway assumes that present trends of relatively unrestrained use of fossil fuels and high population growth will continue. According to this emission pathway, by 2100 the global average temperature will probably be more than 4°C above preindustrial levels (figure), with higher average temperatures over land. Inertia in climate systems would mean that projected global temperatures would continue to rise for several hundred years; the mean estimate for this emission pathway in 2300 would be at least 8°C above preindustrial levels. Long-term global average warming of 12°C or more is possible from unconstrained fossil fuel burning. An increase of 12°C in global average temperature would create conditions in which physiological limits for outdoor activity would be reached during certain times of the year in many heavily populated parts of the world.3 One study estimates that under RCP 8·5 there would be about a 40% reduction in global labour capacity during the hottest months by 2100.4

