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Environmental health: our best life insurance

The global pandemic of COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of certain areas that have been little studied until now, such as the link between the functioning of ecosystems and the emergence of new diseases. More and more scientists are highlighting the complex links between the pressure exerted by humans on ecosystems and the emergence of new infectious diseases, particularly zoonoses. In less than a century, human activities have become a major cause of changes in our environment, resulting in the disruption of our ecosystems.

The Covid-19 crisis is symptomatic of the interrelations between human health, animal health and the environment in a context of globalisation. This crisis is taking place at a time of accelerating epidemic emergence. Like all ecological crises, it first strikes the most vulnerable. Behind the spread of the coronavirus appears, in fact, the extent of chronic diseases, some of which are directly linked to the degradation of the environment, such as respiratory diseases and insufficiencies caused by air pollution, or linked to our lifestyle and diet, such as obesity, type II diabetes and certain cardiovascular pathologies, parasitism, resistance to antibiotics, certain endocrine disruptions, and cancers linked to pesticides. Human health is linked to that of ecosystems and to the balance of the major processes that regulate the earth system. The living world is, in fact, an interconnected world. Living beings do not live independently of each other. Within each ecosystem, they interact closely with the environment in which they live and are linked to each other by multiple relationships.

The environmental factors that disrupt ecosystems are manifold: climate change, collapse of biodiversity, agricultural intensification and specialisation, deforestation, industrial livestock farming, economic globalisation, characteristics of human environments, the food system, the use of pesticides, and the composition of our plate.

The health of living things is our health. A rich and functional biodiversity is our best life insurance. We are called upon to make a twofold revolution: to put health back at the heart of public policy and to place the environment at the heart of health policy. Our health depends on the health of the planet. So does the survival of humanity.

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