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Personal View

Climate change and multiple emerging infectious diseases

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Introduction

In the primordial relationship between pathogens and hosts, evolution ensures that there will always be winners and losers and, equally importantly, that such outcomes will continually change. New infectious diseases will always emerge and old threats can appear again. However, the concern is that climate change will accelerate this dynamic. Any such ‘ramping up’ of disease emergence offers a range of possible outcomes, from little overall impact to the occurrence of potentially catastrophic, collective disease events (Del Rio Vilas et al., 2013).

Since the 1940s, the majority of emerging infectious diseases (EIDs) have originated from animal species (Cohen, 2000; Jones et al., 2008; Lloyd-Smith et al., 2009; Woods et al., 2012). Over half of the new infectious disease events from 1996 to 2009 began in Africa (Woods et al., 2012). The ‘spillover’ of EIDs into wider populations has been linked to host shifts and anthropomorphic driven change, ranging from globalisation, urbanisation, trade, climate and land use change to habitat fragmentation and loss of biodiversity (Lloyd-Smith et al., 2009; Cunningham et al., 2012; Morse et al., 2012; Woods et al., 2012; Woolhouse et al., 2012; Antia et al., 2013; Daszak et al., 2013).

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