

## LETTERS

## CLIMATE CHANGE

## Invest now in adaptive strategies to cope with weather instability

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Climate change will increase weather instability and the occurrence of extreme hot and cold episodes, even in regions and populations not usually affected.<sup>1</sup> From the end of January to mid-February 2012 Italy experienced record low temperatures over 10-18 days. Mean daily temperatures were 10°C lower than normal, and snow of up to 3 m deep was recorded in northern and central regions during the first half of February. Entire communities were isolated and cut off from energy and food supplies principally because of the snow.

Fourteen large urban areas showed an increase in mortality among those aged 75 and over, with an overall 1578 (25%) excess deaths, ranging from 22% in Bologna to 58% in Turin. In Rome the increase in daily deaths occurred with the decline in temperatures and remained high till the end of February, while in Genoa the effect was observed several days after the temperature fell.

Italy, like many other Mediterranean countries, lacks adaptive strategies to prevent cold related health effects. The impact of this recent episode shows that investing in a cold plan is important even in a time of economic crisis. Identifying those most vulnerable to extreme temperatures is important. Preparedness may be achieved through introducing warning systems and local prevention measures according to the degree of risk, with targeting of vulnerable people. Information campaigns are needed to raise awareness among doctors, vulnerable groups, and the general public.

Competing interests: None declared.

<sup>1</sup> McMichael T, Montgomery H, Costello T. Health risks, present and future, from global climate change. *BMJ* 2012;344:e1359. (19 March.)

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