

Microplastics in drinking water not a health risk for now: WHO

● WHO said that microplastics larger than 150 micrometres are not likely to be absorbed by the human body

Geneva, Switzerland

The World Health Organization (WHO) said the level of microplastics in drinking-water is not yet dangerous for humans but called for more research into potential future risk.

In its first report into the effects of microplastics on human health, WHO looked into the specific impact of microplastics in tap and bottled water.

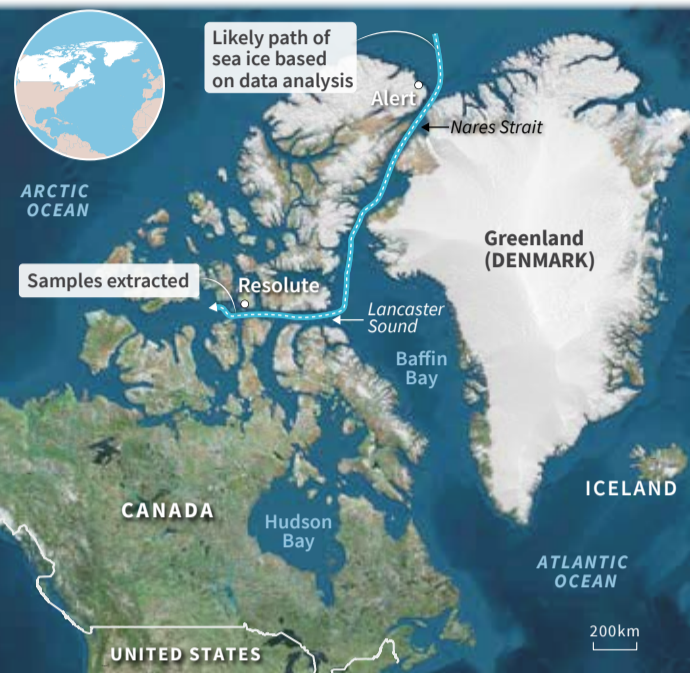
"The headline messages to reassure drinking water consumers around the world, that based on this assessment, our assessment of the risk is that it's low," said Bruce Gordon, WHO coordinator of water and sanitation.

WHO said that data on the presence of microplastics in drinking water is currently limited, with few reliable studies, making it difficult to analyse the results.

WHO has called on researchers to conduct a more in-depth evaluation into microplastics and the potential impact on human health.

Arctic ice loaded with microplastic

Ice extracted from a drifting block by scientists on an 18-day expedition



Source: US National Science Foundation and Heising-Simons Foundation/maps4news.com

"We urgently need to know more about the health impact of microplastics because they are everywhere -- including in our drinking water"

MARIA NEIRA, DIRECTOR OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT AT WHO

The organisation has also urged a crackdown in plastic pollution to benefit the environment and reduce human exposure to microplastics.

The report said that irrespective of human health risks caused by microplastics in drinking-water "measures should be taken by policymakers and the public to better manage plastics and reduce the use

of plastics where possible".

WHO said that microplastics larger than 150 micrometres are not likely to be absorbed by the human body but said the chance of absorbing very small microplastic particles, including nano-sized plastics, could be higher, although it said data is limited.

"We urgently need to know more about the health impact of microplastics because they are everywhere -- including in our drinking water," said Maria Neira, director of the Public Health Department at WHO, in a statement.

"We also need to stop the rise in plastic pollution worldwide."

The report warns of other dangers ahead: if plastic emissions in the environment continue at the current rate, microplastics could present widespread risks for aquatic ecosystems in a century, which could in turn increase human exposure.

Experts recommend wastewater treatment, which can remove more than 90 per cent of microplastics in water by using treatments such as filtration.

WHO said those measures would have a double advantage as it would also address the problem of faecally contaminated water by removing microbial pathogens and chemicals that can cause deadly diarrhoeal diseases.

Putin vows 'symmetric response' to missile test

Moscow, Russia

Russian President Vladimir Putin said yesterday he has ordered the military to prepare a "symmetric response" after Washington tested a formerly banned missile.

Putin said he had ordered an analysis of "the level of threat for our country created by the actions of the US and to take comprehensive measures to prepare a symmetric response".

The US Department of Defense said Monday it had tested a type of ground-launched missile that was banned under the 1987 INF agreement, which limited the use of nuclear and conventional medium-range weapons.

Moscow and Washington ripped up the pact early this month after several months of accusing one another of breaching its conditions.

Russia and China have both warned that Sunday's launch of the nuclear-capable Tomahawk cruise missile with a MK-41 launcher had heightened military tensions and risked sparking a new arms race.

'Violation is clear'

Putin said at a government meeting that the test confirmed prior suspicions that the United States had planned to place banned weapons in Europe.

He said Moscow was against placement of the launchers in Poland in Romania as part of a missile defence system,



Russian President Vladimir Putin

but the US denied they could be used offensively to launch Tomahawks.

"Now the fact of the violation is clear, and it's useless to deny it," Putin said. "The question is, how do we know what will be placed in Romania and Poland?"

Washington's "true intentions", he said, are to "deploy formerly banned weapons in various regions of the world".

But placing them in Europe as well as in Asia "touches upon our basic interests, since it is close to Russian borders".

The INF agreement, signed by Ronald Reagan and the last Soviet Union leader Mikhail Gorbachev, limited the use of conventional and nuclear missiles with ranges of 500 to 5,500 kilometres (310 to 3,420 miles).

G7 leaders vow 'concrete measures' over Amazon fires

Berlin, Germany

G7 leaders gathering in France this weekend plan to hammer out "concrete measures" in response to the wildfires raging in the Amazon rainforest, putting them on a collision course with Brazil's rightwing leader.

French President Emmanuel Macron, who is hosting the G7 summit in the resort town of Biarritz, went so far on Friday as to accuse his Brazilian counterpart of lying on pledges in June to help fight global warming.

"Given the attitude of Brazil over the last weeks, the president can only conclude that President Bolsonaro lied to him at the Osaka (G20) summit," a French presidential official said.

France said it will oppose an ambitious trade deal between the EU and South America's Mercosur nations, which would effectively kill any chance of ratification.

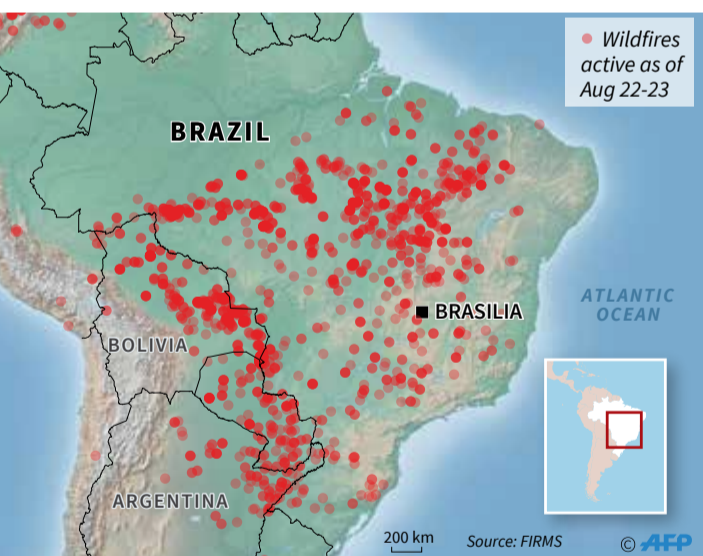
Macron had already drawn Bolsonaro's ire by saying the Amazon fires would be a priority on the G7 agenda, a stance that was backed Friday by German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

Britain's new Prime Minister Boris Johnson is also "extremely concerned by the fires," a spokeswoman said, as demonstrations were held across Europe calling for Brazil to step up actions to quench the blazes.

Bolsonaro blasted the move to make the fires as topic for G7 leaders without any participation by Brazil, saying it reflected a "colonialist mentality."

The latest official figures show 76,720 forest fires were recorded in Brazil so far this year.

The Amazon ablaze



This handout picture collected by a satellite of 2019 Planet Labs, Inc shows smoke and fires in Brazil's state Para

Things to know about the Amazon

Sanctuary of biodiversity

The Amazon basin, spanning 7.4 million square kilometers, covers nearly 40 per cent of Latin America and is spread across nine countries: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, French Guiana, Guyana, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela. About 60pc of it is in Brazil.

The Amazon forest, of which 2.1 million sq km are protected zones, is home to a biodiversity sanctuary that is unique in the world.

A quarter of the Earth's species are found there, namely 30,000 types of plants, 2,500 fish, 1,500 birds, 500 mammals, 550 reptiles and 2.5 million insects, according to the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO).

In the past 20 years, 2,200 new species of plants and vertebrates have been discovered there.



'Lungs of the earth'

The Amazon contains a third of the world's primary forests and, via the Amazon River and its tributaries, provides 20pc of the Earth's unfrozen fresh water. The Amazon is the world's largest river and -- by some accounts since new research was carried out in 2007 -- the longest, running for up to 6,900 kilometers (4,287 miles). The forest acts as a carbon sink, absorbing more CO₂ than it emits while releasing oxygen, and stocking 90 to 140 billion tonnes of CO₂, which helps regulate worldwide global warming, according to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). But deforestation is reducing this capacity for absorbing CO₂.



420 tribes

The Amazon has been inhabited for at least 11,000 years and today counts 34 million people, of whom two-thirds live in cities.

Nearly three million are Indians who are members of some 420 different tribes, around 60 of which live in total isolation, according to ACTO. The Amazon's Indians speak 86 languages and 650 dialects. The largest Amazon tribe is the Tikuna, counting some 40,000 members who live in Brazil, Peru and Colombia, according to Survival International.



Massive deforestation

Almost 20pc of the Amazon forest has disappeared in the last half-century, according to the WWF, and this is accelerating.

Since Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro took power in at the start of 2019, the rate of deforestation by July was nearly four times higher than a year earlier, according to a satellite system known as DETER, which is used by the National Institute for Space Research (INPE). According to the INPE, which tracks clear-cutting of the rainforest, around 2,254 km² of the Amazon forest were cleared in July, a spike of 278pc from a year ago.