How Deforestation Affects Pandemics

Deforestation can contribute to pandemics more than you may realize. When we wipe out forest space, forcing animals to live in smaller more densely populated environments, humans are more likely to come into contact with the infectious microbes these animals can carry. Animals themselves are also more likely to exchange infectious microbes, creating novel viruses, when they live in close quarters.

> *Yet despite years of global outcry, deforestation still runs rampant. An average of 28 million hectares of forest have been cut down annually since 2016, and there is no sign of a slowdown.*
>
> *Stopping Deforestation Can Prevent Pandemics*

Some of the most infectious viruses of the past two decades like Ebola, SARS, and SARS-CoV-2, have come from animals in dense tropical forests. Not only does deforestation increase the risks for novel viruses like this but it increases the spread of other viruses that originated in rain forests. A study released in 2019 showed that raising deforestation by 10% would result in a 3.3% rise in malaria cases or 7.4 million people around the world.

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To decrease deforestation we as a society should eat less meat, eat less processed foods, and waste less food, lessening the demand for pastures and crops for biofuels and palm oils. Additionally, slowing population growth can slow deforestation. Providing women in developing countries with better education and access to contraceptives can slow population growth.

As we implement these solutions, we can also find new outbreaks earlier. Epidemiologists want to tiptoe into wild habitats and test mammals known to carry coronaviruses—bats, rodents, badgers, civets, pangolins and monkeys—to map how the germs are moving.

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