Syllabus subtopic: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

News: The Lancet has published a report titled- ‘Countdown on Health and Climate Change’.

Prelims focus: Key findings of the report.

Mains focus: Concerns and challenges and ways to address them.

- The report is a comprehensive yearly analysis tracking progress across 41 key indicators, demonstrating what action to meet Paris Agreement targets — or business as usual — means for human health.

- The project is a collaboration between 120 experts from 35 institutions, including the World Health Organisation, the World Bank, University College London, and the Tsinghua University in Beijing.

Key findings of the report:

1. Climate change is already damaging the health of the world’s children and is set to shape the well-being of an entire generation, unless the world meets the target to limit warming to well below 2°C.
2. As temperatures rise, infants will bear the greatest burden of malnutrition and rising food prices — average yield potential of maize and rice has declined almost 2% in India since the 1960s, with malnutrition already responsible for two-thirds of under-5 deaths.
3. Also, children will suffer most from the rise in infectious diseases — with climatic suitability for the Vibrio bacteria that cause cholera rising 3% a year in India since the early 1980s.
4. With its huge population and high rates of healthcare inequality, poverty and malnutrition, few countries are likely to suffer from the health effects of climate change as much as India.
5. Diarrhoeal infections, a major cause of child mortality, will spread into new areas, whilst deadly heatwaves, similar to the one in 2015 that killed thousands of people in India, could soon become the norm.

Increased vulnerability:

1. Children are particularly vulnerable to the health risks of a changing climate. Their bodies and immune systems are still developing, leaving them more susceptible to disease and environmental pollutants.
2. The damage done in early childhood is persistent and pervasive, with health
consequences lasting for a lifetime.

3. As temperatures rise, harvests will shrink — threatening food security and driving up food prices. This will hit infants hardest.

4. They would also feel deadliest impact of disease outbreaks.

5. If the world follows a business-as-usual pathway, with high carbon emissions and climate change continuing at the current rate, a child born today will face a world on average over 4°C warmer by their 71st birthday, threatening their health at every stage of their lives.

Challenges for India:

- Over the past two decades, the Government of India has launched many initiatives and programmes to address a variety of diseases and risk factors. But the public health gains achieved over the past 50 years could soon be reversed by the changing climate.
- For the world to meet its UN climate goals and protect the health of the next generation, the energy landscape will have to change drastically, and soon.
- Nothing short of a 7.4% year-on-year cut in fossil CO2 emissions from 2019 to 2050 will limit global warming to the more ambitious goal of 1.5°C.
- Without immediate action from all countries to cut greenhouse gas emissions, gains in wellbeing and life expectancy will be compromised, and climate change will come to define the health of an entire generation.

Need of the hour:

To dramatically reduce emissions by 2050, and to meet multiple Sustainable Development Goals, India must transition away from coal and towards renewable energy. It will also need to enhance public transport, increase use of cleaner fuels, and improve waste management and agricultural production practice.