
NEW WHO REPORT: DEATHS FROM NONCOMMUNICABLE DISEASES ON THE RISE, WITH DEVELOPING WORLD HIT HARDEST

27 April, 2011 Moscow – Noncommunicable diseases are the leading killer today and are on the increase, the first World Health Organization (WHO) Global Status Report on Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs) launched today confirms. In 2008, 36.1 million people died from conditions such as heart disease, strokes, chronic lung diseases, cancers and diabetes. Nearly 80% of these deaths occurred in low- and middle-income countries.

“The rise of chronic noncommunicable diseases presents an enormous challenge,” says WHO Director-General Dr Margaret Chan, who launched the report during the WHO Global Forum on addressing the challenge of noncommunicable diseases, being held today in Moscow, Russian Federation “For some countries, it is no exaggeration to describe the situation as an impending disaster; a disaster for health, for society, and most of all for national economies.”

Dr Chan adds: “Chronic noncommunicable diseases deliver a two-punch blow to development. They cause billions of dollars in losses of national income, and they push millions of people below the poverty line, each and every year.”

But millions of deaths can be prevented by stronger implementation of measures that exist today. These include policies that promote government-wide action against NCDs: stronger anti-tobacco controls and promoting healthier diets, physical activity, and reducing harmful use of alcohol; along with improving people's access to essential healthcare.

The Global Status Report on NCDs provides global, regional and country-specific statistics, evidence, and experiences needed to launch a more forceful response to the growing threat posed by chronic noncommunicable diseases. It provides a baseline to chart future NCD trends and responses in countries, including in terms of its socioeconomic impacts. The report provides advice and recommendations for all countries and pays special attention to conditions in low and middle-income countries which are hardest hit by NCDs.

Cardiovascular diseases account for most NCD deaths, or 17 million people annually, followed by cancer (7.6 million), respiratory disease (4.2 million), and diabetes (1.3 million). These four groups of diseases account for around 80% of all NCD deaths, and share four common risk factors: tobacco use, inadequate physical inactivity, the harmful use of alcohol, and poor diets.

“About 30% of people dying from NCDs in low- and middle-income countries are aged under 60 years and are in their most productive period of life. These premature deaths are all the more tragic because they are largely preventable,” says Dr Ala Alwan, WHO Assistant Director-General for Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health. “This is a great loss, not just at an individual level, but also profoundly affect the family and a country's workforce. For the millions struggling with poverty, a vicious circle ensues. Poverty contributes to NCDs and NCDs contribute to poverty. Unless the epidemic of NCDs is aggressively confronted, the global goal of reducing poverty will be difficult to achieve.”

NCDs killed 63% of people who died worldwide in 2008. This equals 36 million and nearly 80% of these NCD deaths – equivalent to 29 million people – occurred in low – and middle-income countries, dispelling the myth that such conditions are mainly a problem of affluent societies. Without action, the NCD epidemic is projected to kill 52 million people annually by 2030.

The WHO report provides country-by-country estimates of the NCDs epidemic and their risk factors, the challenges blocking many countries from taking effective action, and measures that can save millions of lives and reduce spiralling healthcare costs.

Such measures include implementing the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, such as raising taxes on tobacco, banning tobacco advertising and legislating to curb smoking in public places. Other measures include reducing levels of salt in foods, stopping the inappropriate marketing of unhealthy food and non-alcoholic beverages to children, and controls on harmful alcohol use.

This new report is a key component of the 2008–2013 Action Plan for the implementation of the WHO Global Strategy on the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases. This Action Plan was endorsed by the 2008 World Health Assembly. It provides countries a roadmap for taking action against NCDs, including raising the priority of NCD control, improving disease surveillance, enabling governments to take comprehensive action against the diseases, and protecting countries, particularly developing, from the burden of the epidemic.

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The report was launched during the WHO Global Forum on NCDs, which has attracted around 300 key figures from the civil and private sectors, academia, and others to urge greater action against this group of diseases. The forum provides direct feedback to the 28–29 April First Global Ministerial Conference on Healthy Lifestyles and NCD Control, organized by the Russian Federation and WHO.

These two events are key milestones in the build-up to the first-ever UN General Assembly High-level Meeting on the Prevention

and Control of NCDs, being held in New York, the United States of America, on 19–20 September, 2011.

For more information contact:

Paul Garwood, Communications officer, World Health Organization. Email: garwoodp@who.int

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