

## Urgent need to check epidemic of noncommunicable diseases: WHO

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"This number is expected to grow larger if we do not act now to arrest this epidemic," said Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh, WHO, deputy regional director, South-East Asia.

Heart diseases, cancer, diabetes, and respiratory diseases account for most of the deaths and disease due to noncommunicable diseases.

While noncommunicable diseases are a global public health challenge, nearly three quarters of the deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries.

"The problem is growing, particularly in the South-East Asia Region, where two out of three deaths are caused by noncommunicable diseases. Nearly half of deaths due to noncommunicable diseases occur in the 30 to 70 year age group. Today, a 30 year old person living in the WHO South-East Asia Region has 25 percent chances of dying from one of the four main noncommunicable diseases before his or her 70th birthday. This probability is much less at 15 percent for an individual in the Americas," Dr Singh added.

Most of the premature NCD deaths are preventable. Promoting simple lifestyle changes and diet modifications can prevent noncommunicable diseases.

"These recommendations include 'best buys' or cost-effective, high-impact interventions such as banning all forms of tobacco and alcohol advertising, reducing salt consumption, replacing trans fats with polyunsaturated fats, promoting and protecting breastfeeding, early detection and treatment of high blood pressure and preventing cervical cancer through periodic screening," explained Dr Singh.

The global WHO report on NCD warns that the death toll due to noncommunicable diseases would mount to 52 million by the

year 2030 from 38 million in 2012.

Dr Poonam urged that the report highlights the need to act immediately. "All governments must commit and set national NCD targets this year and implement policy and cost-effective interventions for prevention and control of major noncommunicable diseases. High rates of death and disease, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, is a reflection of inadequate investment in cost-effective NCD interventions. WHO recommends that all countries implement the 'best buys' interventions," she opined.

Noncommunicable diseases impede efforts to alleviate poverty and advance sustainable development.

Dr Singh said, "When people fall sick and die in the prime of their lives, productivity suffers. Besides, the cost of treating diseases can be devastating - both to the individual and to the country's health system. It is time that governments partner with the private sector, NGOs, media and civil society, to reduce the NCD burden with appropriate policies and measures to achieve the global voluntary NCD targets by 2025."

### **Global voluntary noncommunicable disease targets by 2025:**

#### **Target 1**

A 25 percent relative reduction in risk of premature mortality from cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases

#### **Target 2**

At least 10 percent relative reduction in the harmful use of alcohol, as appropriate within the national context

#### **Target 3**

A 10 percent relative reduction in prevalence of insufficient physical activity

#### **Target 4**

A 30 percent relative reduction in mean population intake of salt/sodium

#### **Target 5**

A 30 percent relative reduction in prevalence of current tobacco use in persons aged 15+ years

#### **Target 6**

A 25 percent relative reduction in the prevalence of raised blood pressure or contain the prevalence of raised blood pressure, according to national circumstances

#### **Target 7**

Halt the rise in diabetes and obesity

#### **Target 8**

At least 50 percent of eligible people receive drug therapy and counselling (including glycaemic control) to prevent heart attacks and strokes

#### **Target 9**

An 80 percent availability of the affordable basic technologies and essential medicines, including generics, required to treat major NCD in both public and private facilities

WHO South East Asia Region has an additional target to reduce household air pollution by reducing the use of solid fuels for cooking by 50 percent.