



UP TO 650 000 PEOPLE DIE OF RESPIRATORY DISEASES LINKED TO SEASONAL FLU EACH YEAR

14 DECEMBER 2017 | GENEVA - Up to 650 000 deaths annually are associated with respiratory diseases from seasonal influenza, according to new estimates by the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (US-CDC), the World Health Organization and global health partners.

This marks an increase on the previous global estimate of 250 000 – 500 000, which dates from over ten years ago and covered all influenza-related deaths, including cardiovascular disease or diabetes. The new figures of 290 000 – 650 000 deaths are based on more recent data from a larger, more diverse group of countries, including lower middle income countries, and exclude deaths from non-respiratory diseases.

“These figures indicate the high burden of influenza and its substantial social and economic cost to the world,” said Dr Peter Salama, Executive Director of WHO’s Health Emergencies Programme. “They highlight the importance of influenza prevention for seasonal epidemics, as well as preparedness for pandemics.”

The estimates take into account findings from recent influenza respiratory mortality studies, including a study conducted by the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (US-CDC), published in *The Lancet* on Thursday (14 December).

According to US-CDC, most deaths occur among people aged over 75 years, and in the world’s poorest regions. Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for the world’s greatest flu mortality risk, followed closely by the Eastern Mediterranean and Southeast Asia.

“All countries, rich and poor, large and small, must work together to control influenza outbreaks before the arrival of the next pandemic. This includes building capacity to detect and respond to outbreaks, and strengthening health systems to improve the health of the most vulnerable and those most at risk,” said Dr Salama.

Nearly all deaths among children under five with influenza-related lower respiratory tract infections occur in developing countries, but the effects of seasonal influenza epidemics on the world’s poorest are not fully known.

WHO is working with partners to assess the global influenza burden of disease by providing guidance and expertise to Member States to measure the influenza disease burden and its economic consequences.

Further surveillance and laboratory studies of other diseases such as cardiovascular disease, which can be influenza-related, are expected to yield substantially higher estimates over the next few years.

WHO encourages countries to prioritize influenza prevention and produce national estimates to inform prevention policies. Annual influenza vaccination is recommended to prevent disease and complications from influenza infection. Vaccination is especially important for people at higher risk of serious influenza complications and death, and for health workers.

Seasonal influenza is an acute viral infection that spreads easily from person to person and circulates worldwide. Most people recover within a week without requiring medical attention. Common respiratory diseases related to seasonal influenza that can cause death include pneumonia and bronchitis.

WHO's Influenza Burden of Disease Working Group comprises experts from the All India Institute of Medical Science, the National University of Singapore, the South African National Institute of Communicable Diseases, US CDC, Universidad del Valle de Guatemala and the University of Edinburgh.

Available from: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2017/seasonal-flu/en/>

DEMENTIA: NUMBER OF PEOPLE AFFECTED TO TRIPLE IN NEXT 30 YEARS

7 DECEMBER 2017 | GENEVA - As the global population ages, the number of people living with dementia is expected to triple from 50 million to 152 million by 2050.

“Nearly 10 million people develop dementia each year, 6 million of them in low- and middle-income countries,” says Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of WHO. “The suffering that results is enormous. This is an alarm call: we must pay greater attention to this growing challenge and ensure that all people living with dementia, wherever they live, get the care that they need.”

The estimated annual global cost of dementia is US\$ 818 billion, equivalent to more than 1% of global gross domestic product. The total cost includes direct medical costs, social care and informal care (loss of income of carers). By 2030, the cost is expected to have more than doubled, to US\$ 2 trillion, a cost that could undermine social and economic development and overwhelm health and social services, including long-term care systems.

First global monitoring system launched

The Global Dementia Observatory, a web-based platform launched by WHO today, will track progress on the provision of services for people with dementia and for those who care for them, both within countries and globally. It will monitor the presence of national policy and plans, risk reduction measures and infrastructure for providing care and treatment. Information on surveillance systems and disease burden data is also included.

“This is the first global monitoring system for dementia that includes such a comprehensive range of data,” said Dr Tarun Dua, of WHO's Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse. “The system will not only enable us to track progress, but just as importantly, to identify areas where future efforts are most needed.”

Encouraging results in planning for dementia and support for carers

To date, WHO has collected data from 21 countries (1) of all income levels. By the end of 2018, it is expected that 50 countries will be contributing data.

Initial results indicate that a high proportion of countries submitting data are already taking action in areas such as planning, dementia awareness and dementia-friendliness (such as facilitating participation in community activities and tackling the stigmatization of people living with dementia) and provision of support and training for carers, who are very often family members.