

In new estimates released on 25 March 2014, the World Health Organization (WHO) reports that around 7 million people, including around 400 000 in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, died prematurely in 2012 as a result of air pollution exposure. This finding more than doubles previous estimates and confirms that air pollution is now the world's largest single environmental health risk. Reducing air pollution could save millions of lives.

Excessive air pollution is often a by-product of unsustainable policies in sectors such as transport, energy, waste management and industry. In order to undertake proper actions to mitigate the impact of air pollution on health, the ministries of health in the Region will need to assume the roles of stewarding broker and interlocutor in partnership with those sectors within their respective governments. It is essential that a collaborative multi-agency approach is adopted, emphasizing the leadership of the public health sector in terms of governance and surveillance responsibilities, as well as advocacy and motivation of other sectors.

In particular, the new data reveal a stronger link between both indoor and outdoor air pollution exposure and cardiovascular diseases, such as stroke and ischaemic heart disease, as well as between air pollution and cancer. This is in addition to air pollution's role in the development of respiratory diseases, including acute respiratory infections and chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases.

The new estimates are not only based on more knowledge about the diseases caused by air pollution, but also upon better assessment of human exposure to air pollutants through the use of improved measurements and technology. This has enabled scientists to make a more detailed analysis of health risks from a wider demographic spread that now includes rural as well as urban areas.

Included in the assessment is a breakdown of deaths attributed to specific diseases, underlining that the vast majority of air pollution deaths are due to cardiovascular diseases as follows.

Disease

Percentage of outdoor air pollution-caused deaths

Percentage of indoor air pollution-caused deaths

Ischaemic heart disease

40

26

Stroke

40

34

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease

10

22

Lung cancer

6

6

Acute lower respiratory infections in children

4

12

The new estimates are based on the latest WHO mortality data from 2012, as well as evidence of health risks from air pollution exposures. Estimates of people's exposure to outdoor air pollution in different parts of the world were formulated through a new global data mapping. This incorporated satellite data, ground-level monitoring measurements and data on pollution emissions from key sources, as well as modeling of how pollution drifts in the air.

Related links 

[News release: 7 million premature deaths annually linked to air pollution](#)

[Read more about air pollution](#)

[Ambient \(outdoor\) air quality and health \(factsheet\)](#)

[Household air pollution and health \(factsheet\)](#)

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