Cairo, Egypt, 31 May, 2019 ✠ On this World No Tobacco Day, the World Health Organization (WHO) is calling on people to quit tobacco smoking and say no to second-hand smoke to protect their lungs. Tobacco is harmful in all its forms. It kills over 8 million people every year. Tobacco smoking and second-hand smoke can cause lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, asthma and tuberculosis. Tobacco smoke in itself is a very dangerous form of air pollution.

**Tobacco has a negative impact on lung health**

Tobacco smoking is the primary cause for lung cancer, responsible for over two thirds of lung cancer deaths globally. Tobacco smoke contains over 7000 chemicals, at least 69 of which are known to cause cancer. Second-hand smoke exposure at home or in the work place also increases the risk of lung cancer. Additionally, tobacco smoking is the leading cause of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, a condition where the build-up of pus-filled mucus in the lungs results in a painful cough and agonising breathing difficulties. The risk of developing chronic obstructive pulmonary disease is particularly high among individuals who start smoking at a young age, as tobacco smoke significantly slows lung development. Tobacco also exacerbates asthma, which restricts activity and contributes to disability. Furthermore, tuberculosis damages the lungs and reduces lung function, which is further exacerbated by tobacco smoking.

**Alarm bells in the Eastern Mediterranean Region**

Around 38% of men and 4% of women are smokers. In some countries, as many as 57% of men and 29% of women smoke. “Smoking among young people is particularly worrying,” says Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean. “It has reached 42% in boys and 31% in girls”. This includes smoking shisha, which is more popular among young people than cigarettes. “By 2025, smoking is expected to rise in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, contrary to the trend in the rest of the world,” explains Dr Al-Mandhari. “This will lead to an escalating epidemic of lung disease regionally”.

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Don’t let tobacco take your breath away

Quit smoking to: reduce the risk of lung cancer; slow the progression of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease; and improve asthma symptoms.

Raise awareness of the harmful effects of tobacco use and second-hand smoke exposure.

Discourage the use of tobacco in any form.

Advocate for your rights, and let things other than tobacco take your breath away.

Governments made commitments to reduce tobacco use by 30% by 2025. “Policies are in place to help achieve this target,” says Dr Al-Mandhari. “The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and the MPOWER measures to reduce demand for this deadly product can help us beat tobacco and save lives.”

Stop tobacco from taking your breath away. Tobacco kills one person every 4 seconds. Do not be that person and do not contribute to the death toll.

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