3 April, Cairo - To mark World Health Day on 7 April, the World Health Organization (WHO) is calling for intensified efforts to prevent and control hypertension, also known as high blood pressure. Worldwide, high blood pressure is estimated to affect more than one in three adults aged 25 and over, or about one billion people.

High blood pressure is one of the most important contributors to heart attacks and stroke – which together are the world's highest causes of premature death and disability. Researchers estimate that high blood pressure contributes to nearly 9.4 million deaths each year globally. It also increases the risk of conditions such as kidney failure and blindness.

Detecting high blood pressure is the first step in preventing and controlling it. On this year's World Health Day, WHO is calling on all adults around the world to have their blood pressure measured. When people know their blood pressure level, they can take steps to control it. "Our aim today is to make people aware of the need to know their blood pressure, to take high blood pressure seriously, and then to take control," says Dr Margaret Chan, Director-General of WHO.

Dr Ala Alwan, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, reiterated that the prevention and control of blood pressure is possible through affordable and effective interventions: "We need to change our lifestyles. This means eating a healthy balanced diet rich in vegetables and fruit. It means reducing the amount of salt we eat and avoiding food rich in fat and sugars. And it means maintaining normal body weight and taking regular exercise".

In the Eastern Mediterranean Region, with a population of 600 million people, the rates of physical inactivity are higher than in any other region in the world. Overall, more than a third of men and nearly half of women in the Region are physically inactive. Around 50% of adults in the Region are overweight and in some countries more than 70% of women and an increasing number of children are overweight. In some countries of the Region more than 50% of men use tobacco.

The prevalence of hypertension is highest in Africa (46% of adults) while the lowest prevalence is found in the Americas (35% of adults). In the Eastern Mediterranean Region the prevalence of hypertension is one of the highest (41% of adults) Overall, high-income countries have a lower prevalence of hypertension (35% of adults) than low- and middle-income groups (40% of adults) – thanks to successful multisectoral public policies and better access to health care.

WHO's campaign to encourage people to measure their blood pressure is a response to the United Nations Political Declaration on Noncommunicable Diseases, which was adopted by Heads of State and Government in September 2011. The Declaration commits countries to make greater efforts to promote public awareness campaigns to further the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases such as heart disease and stroke, cancers, diabetes and chronic respiratory diseases.

"High blood pressure is known as a "silent killer" because in many cases it is detected too late to avoid complications. Early detection is a key factor to avoid stroke, heart disease, heart and kidney failure," says Dr Alwan.

WHO has guidance for Member States for implementing affordable and effective solutions to reduce health and financial burden linked to hypertension, such as putting in place tools to manage total cardiovascular risk approach in primary health settings.

Related links

More information on the regional World Health Day campaign

More information on the global campaign

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