

7 May 2014 - The 2014 version of the Ambient Air Pollution (AAP) database launched by WHO on 7 May reports that air quality in most cities worldwide that monitor outdoor (ambient) air pollution fails to meet WHO guidelines for safe levels of air pollutants putting people at additional risk of respiratory disease and other health problems.

The database covers 1600 cities across 91 countries (including 26 cities across 11 countries from our Eastern Mediterranean Region). It reveals that more cities worldwide are monitoring outdoor air quality, reflecting growing recognition of air pollution's health risks. Despite the upswing in air quality monitoring, many developing cities remain without significant urban monitoring capacity. Data availability is particularly poor in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

Worldwide only 12% of the people living in cities reporting such data, reside in cities where the air quality complies with WHO air quality guideline levels, unfortunately in our Region this figure is close to 0%. About half of the urban population being monitored is exposed to air pollution that is 2.5 times or more higher than WHO guideline levels - putting those people at additional risk of serious, long-term health problems.

In most cities, where the situation today can be compared with previous years, air pollution is getting worse. Many factors are contributing to this increase, including reliance on fossil fuels such as coal fired power plants, dependence on private transport motor vehicles, inefficient use of energy in buildings, biomass use for cooking and heating. But notable improvements in some major cities demonstrate that air quality can be improved when policy measures such as banning the use of coal for space heating, using renewable/clean fuels for electricity production, improved efficiency of motor vehicle engines are put into place.

Last month WHO issued information on the global number of premature deaths from outdoor air pollution in rural and urban areas, with an estimate of 3.7 million premature deaths in 2012 (including 250 000 deaths in the Region). The Organization also emphasised that indoor and outdoor air pollution combined are one of the largest risks to health worldwide.

Effective policies and strategies to win the fight against air pollution and reduce the number of people suffering from respiratory and heart disease, as well as lung cancer, are well understood, but they need to be implemented at sufficient scale. Energy efficient housing, compact urban development around public transport routes, street design that is appealing and

safe for pedestrians and cyclists, and waste management in slums are few examples of such strategies that not only cleans the air but also serves as a catalyst for local economic development and the promotion of healthy urban lifestyles.

Launching this database is a significant step in advancing a WHO roadmap for preventing diseases related to air pollution. This involves the development of a global platform on air quality and health to generate better data on air pollution-related diseases and strengthened support to countries and cities through guidance, information and evidence about health gains from key interventions.

## **Related links**

[Air quality deteriorating in many of the world's cities](#)

**WHO updated global database for air quality and health**

[Description of methods and disclaimer](#)

[Data summary of the AAP database](#)

[Ambient \(outdoor\) air pollution database, by country and city](#)

[FAQ: Ambient \(outdoor\) air pollution database: update 2014 \(f\)](#)

[Ambient \(outdoor\) air pollution in cities database 2014](#)

[Global Health Observatory \(GHO\)](#)

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