



WOMEN AND LUNG HEALTH

International Women's Day: 8 March 2013

A briefing from The Union

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Lung disease is one of the top three causes of death among women worldwide

WHY LUNG HEALTH IS CRITICAL WOMEN'S ISSUE

Lung disease is a leading cause of death among women

- Breath is life, but the central importance of lung health is under-recognised compared to other key health indicators for women, such as blood pressure and weight.
- 16.2% of all deaths among women worldwide are attributable to lung diseases, including respiratory infections (7.4%); chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) (5.1%); tuberculosis (1.8%); trachea, bronchus and lung cancer (1.4%); and asthma (.5%).
- In low-income countries, lower respiratory infections, including pneumonia, are the leading single cause of death among women (11.4%).
- LRIs, COPD, and cancers of the trachea, bronchus and lung account for 13.5% of women's deaths in middle-income countries and 11% in high-income countries.

Source: WHO

The leading risk factor is tobacco use – and it's on the rise among women

- Tobacco use is the leading risk factor for lung disease, and it kills 1.5 million women each year.
- The countries with the highest percentage of female deaths attributed to smoking are the USA (23%), Denmark (21%) Canada, the UK and Iceland (20%), Hungary, Mongolia and Myanmar (18%); New Zealand (16%); Republic of Korea and Malaysia (15%).
- 200 million women now smoke (20% of the total number of smokers).
- A WHO smoking trends survey found that in about 75 of the 151 countries surveyed, the number of boys and girls who smoked were now equal.

Sources: Tobacco Atlas (4th ed.), WHO

Indoor air pollution from using solid fuels for heating and cooking is another major risk factor

- Nearly 3 billion people worldwide, mostly in low-income countries, rely on solid fuel for cooking, light and heating.
- An estimated 2 million deaths are caused by this indoor air pollution; the majority are women, since they do the cooking and other household maintenance. Their babies and young children are also affected.
- In women, research shows a strong association between indoor air pollution and COPD and between exposure to coal smoke and lung cancer.

Sources: Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves, The Union guide

COMMON LUNG DISEASES

Acute respiratory infections (ARI): ARIs are a leading cause of death, especially among young children, and include streptococcus pneumonia and different types of influenza. A recent meta-analysis study found that 1.9 million children died from ARIs in 2000, 70% of them in Africa and South-East Asia.

Asthma: Asthma is a non-communicable, chronic respiratory disease that affects 235 million people worldwide. It is the most common chronic disease among children. The exact causes are not known, but risk factors vary from genetics and allergies to tobacco smoke and air pollution. A study published in 2012 in the

American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine found that women’s asthma symptoms fluctuated with their hormonal cycles, becoming more severe when they were menstruating.

COPD: COPD is an umbrella term for chronic bronchitis and emphysema. It is a non-communicable, chronic disease that can be managed but not cured. In addition to their on-going risk from indoor air pollution, more women are now at risk of COPD because the number of women who smoke has increased. Formerly a disease that primarily affected men, COPD now affects men and women almost equally.

Lung cancer: Cancer is a non-communicable disease caused by the rapid creation of abnormal cells that grow beyond their usual boundaries, form tumours, and can spread throughout the body. Lung cancer causes more deaths than any other form – about 1.37 million deaths each year. 71% of lung cancer deaths worldwide are caused by tobacco use. Among women, 20% of those who get lung cancer have never smoked.

Lower respiratory infections: Lower respiratory infections include pneumonia caused by viruses, bacteria and fungi; bronchitis; and influenza. Pneumonia is the leading killer of children under 5 worldwide, causing an estimated 1.2 million deaths each year. This group of infections is also a leading killer of women, although most cases can be treated with low-cost, effective medicines and care.

Tuberculosis: Tuberculosis is a curable airborne infectious disease, although, In 2008, 700,000 women died from TB, including 200,000 with HIV. More than 3 million women contracted the disease, which cost 17 million Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) and had a major impact on their families. Numerous studies have recorded that the stigma and social exclusion suffered by women with TB can create barriers to treatment.

WHAT THE UNION IS DOING

The Union works in some 75 countries each year conducting research, providing technical assistance and offering training and education programmes to advance the prevention, treatment and control of TB and lung diseases. Its successful model for managing tuberculosis (known today at the WHO Stop TB Strategy) has been adapted to address other lung health issues, including child pneumonia, asthma and TB-HIV. Activities that specifically target women’s lung health challenges include:

- Halting and reversing the increase in tobacco use among women and girls, especially in low-income countries, is an important focus of the Union’s Department of Tobacco Control. The Union has worked with more than 40 countries worldwide to strengthen tobacco control legislation and build capacity for effective tobacco control, reducing the impact of the leading risk factor for all lung diseases.
- The Union has been actively working to build awareness of the deadly consequences of using solid fuel for heating, light and cooking, with particular emphasis on the lung health consequences of this indoor air pollution on women and children. The theme of this year’s World Conference in Paris on October 30–3 November is “Shared air, safe air?” For conference details: www.worldlunghealth.org
- Project Axshya is a Global Fund Round 9 TB project that is adding a new dimension to TB control in India through community “ownership” and civil society-led public health programming. Focused on under-served populations such as women, The Union component is an ambitious advocacy, communication and social mobilisation project covering 300 districts across 21 states to reach about 570 million people.

UNION EXPERTS TO CONTACT

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WOMEN AND LUNG HEALTH: SOURCES AND LINKS TO MORE INFORMATION

- Acute respiratory disease, WHO
http://www.who.int/vaccine_research/diseases/ari/en/index.html
- Asthma linked to menstrual cycle; hormones affect respiratory symptoms, study says
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/09/menstrual-cycle-and-asthma-hormones-respiratory-symptoms-study_n_2102529.html
- Cancer Fact Sheet No 297 (WHO, January 2013)
<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs297/en/index.html>
- Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Syndrome Fact Sheet no 315 (WHO, November 2012)
<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs315/en/index.html>
- Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves
<http://www.cleancookstoves.org>
- Global Asthma Report 2011 (The Union and ISAAC, 2011)
www.globalasthmareport.org
- Global Burden of Disease: 2004 update (WHO, 2008)
http://www.who.int/healthinfo/global_burden_disease/GBD_report_2004update_full.pdf
- Global and regional mortality from 235 causes of death for 20 age groups in 1990 and 2010: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2010 (The Lancet, Vol 380, Issue 9859)
[http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(12\)61728-0/abstract](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(12)61728-0/abstract)
- Global Burden of Respiratory Disease (Webcast of plenary lecture by Prof Guy Marks at the 43rd Union World Conference on Lung Health in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in November 2012)
http://uwclh.conference2web.com/content/1946?from_view=all&view_address=events%3D3%26groups%3D2%26sessions%3D406
- Lung Health Consequences of Exposure to Smoke from Domestic Use of Solid Fuels (The Union, 2009)
<http://www.theunion.org/index.php/en/resources/technical-publications/lung-health/item/75-lung-health-consequences-of-exposure-to-smoke-from-domestic-use-of-solid-fuels>
- “No headway against COPD which now affects women”
<http://health.usnews.com/health-news/family-health/respiratory-disorders/articles/2011/06/29/no-headway-against-copd-which-now-affects-women-more>
- Pneumonia Fact Sheet No 331 (WHO, November 2012)
<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs331/en/>
- Tackling TB and HIV in Women: An Urgent Agenda (Global Coalition on Women and AIDS, July 2010)
<http://www.womenandaids.net/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?guid=aeee44f9-9a9d-4366-9ee4-89e4775cc798>
- Women and Health: today's evidence tomorrow's agenda (WHO)
http://www.who.int/gender/women_health_report/en/index.html
- Women and NCDs (NCD Alliance, March 2011)
<http://ncdalliance.org/sites/default/files/rfiles/Non%20Communicable%20Diseases%20A%20priority%20for%20womens%20health%20and%20development.pdf>
- Women's Health Fact Sheet No 334 (WHO, November 2009)
<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs334/en/>
- 10 Facts about Women's Health (WHO)
<http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/women/en/index.html>
- 10 facts on Gender and Tobacco (WHO)
http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/gender_tobacco/en/index.html