

UN: Deaths up from cancer, diabetes, heart disease

June 21 2011, By EDITH M. LEDERER , Associated Press

(AP) -- Nearly two-thirds of deaths in the world are caused by noncommunicable diseases such as cancer, diabetes and heart and lung disease which are rapidly increasing at a cost to the global economy of trillions of dollars, according to U.N. estimates and preliminary results of a new study.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in a report circulated Monday that while the international community has focused on [communicable diseases](#) such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, the four main noncommunicable diseases "have emerged relatively unnoticed in the developing world and are now becoming a [global epidemic](#)."

According to the report, 36 million people died from noncommunicable diseases in 2008, representing 63 percent of the 57 million global deaths that year. Nearly 80 percent of deaths from these diseases were in the [developing world](#), and 9 million deaths were of men and women under the age of 60, it said.

In 2030, the report said, these diseases are projected to claim the lives of 52 million people.

Ban said the rapidly increasing magnitude of noncommunicable diseases is fueled by rising risk factors including [tobacco use](#), unhealthy diet, lack of physical activity, obesity and harmful alcohol use - and is driven in part by an [aging population](#), the negative impact of urbanization, and the globalization of trade and marketing.

At a press conference Monday to preview a U.N. summit in September that will spotlight the need to tackle these diseases, John Seffrin, CEO of the [American Cancer Society](#), said that by 2030 noncommunicable diseases are expected to cause five times as many deaths as communicable diseases worldwide.

"No health problem in the history of the world has ever gone so hidden, misunderstood and under-recorded," Seffrin said.

Seffrin said "it is the poorest people that suffer the most" because they can't afford early detection and [quality care](#) and must deal with overburdened and poorly equipped health care systems.

He called for urgent action to start solving "what will be the 21st century's greatest health challenge, namely noncommunicable diseases."

Professor David Bloom of the Harvard School of Public Health, who is leading a project to estimate the global economic burden of noncommunicable diseases, said preliminary results indicate that the substantial economic burden caused by these diseases today "will evolve into a staggering economic burden over the next two decades" that could have a huge impact on economic development and fighting poverty.

The project, which is sponsored by the World Economic Forum, is estimating the global costs of newly diagnosed cancer cases at "more than \$300 billion in 2010" and of "chronic obstructive pulmonary disease on the order of \$400 billion in 2010," he said.

Bloom said his researchers also estimate a loss of economic output amounting to \$35 trillion during the 25-year period from 2005 to 2030 due to a key group of noncommunicable diseases - diabetes, ischemic heart disease including strokes, cerebral vascular disease, chronic destructive pulmonary disease, and breast cancer.

He said \$35 trillion represents seven times the current level of global health spending, 15 times the 2011 value of overseas development assistance in the world over the past quarter century, and could massively reduce poverty in the world.

Both the human and economic burden of [noncommunicable diseases](#) can be contained, Bloom said, by devoting resources directly or indirectly to prevention, screening and treatment throughout the world.

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