

World No Tobacco Day targets habit that 'breaks hearts': WHO

Spreading the message that tobacco causes deadly illnesses such as heart disease and stroke helps prevent “needless” loss of life, United Nations health experts said on Thursday.

Coinciding with [World No Tobacco Day 2018](#), observed each 31 May, the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) is warning that tobacco use and exposure to second hand smoke are “major causes” of cardiovascular disease, contributing to three million deaths a year.

The lack of awareness about the risks of tobacco use, is most common in low- and middle-income countries, according to WHO's [Global Report on Trends in Prevalence of Tobacco Smoking 2000-2025](#).

The good news is that these deaths are preventable and we know what needs to be done – *Dr. Douglas Bettcher (WHO)*

In China, for example, more than six out of 10 people are unaware that smoking can cause a heart attack.

In India and Indonesia, meanwhile, more than half of all adults do not know that the habit can lead to a stroke.

Dr. Douglas Bettcher, Director, Department for the Prevention of Noncommunicable Diseases at WHO, told journalists in Geneva that tobacco use is falling globally but it still kills more than seven million people a year.

Progress is uneven in protecting consumers from the tobacco industry, Dr. Bettcher added, explaining that higher income countries are making “faster progress” than their poorer counterparts at protecting consumers, partly owing to stronger regulations.

Latest data from the WHO report indicates that there are around 1.1 billion smokers in the world today – the same number as at the turn of the century.

Despite the apparent lack of progress in tackling the total number of smokers, the report highlights that only one in five people smoke today, compared to more than one in four, 18 years ago. This decline is masked by the world's growing population, Dr. Bettcher said.

Commenting on efforts to encourage people to quit, the UN health expert warned that only around 12 per cent countries are on track to meet global targets to reduce by one-third the number of people dying from non-communicable diseases by 2030, as part of the Sustainable Development Goals agenda.

In a bid to promote heart health, the WHO wants every one of its 194 Member States to implement a series of increasingly strict tobacco control measures.

These include making indoor public and workplaces smoke-free and insisting that tobacco packaging carries warnings that demonstrate the health risks for users.

“The good news is that these deaths are preventable and we know what needs to be done,” Dr. Bettcher said.

He named Ireland and Uruguay as countries which had achieved the highest level of tobacco control before adding that since 2007, the number of people around the world to have benefited from these measures has more than quadrupled, from one billion to five billion.