



Addressing the Challenges of Non-communicable Diseases: *Chronic Lung Disease*

“Non-communicable diseases have emerged as growing health problems for countries in every corner of the globe.”
- U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius

GLOBAL BURDEN

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs), including chronic lung disease, represent an urgent and growing global public health emergency. NCDs, in addition to other chronic diseases such as stroke, are a critical challenge for countries all around the world and at every stage in development.

Chronic lung disease represents a major and increasing global public health burden. Each year, over 4 million people are estimated to die from chronic lung diseases. More than 50% of people affected by preventable chronic lung diseases live in low- and middle-income countries, contributing to the social and economic burden.

WHAT IS CHRONIC LUNG DISEASE?

Chronic lung disease represents a group of ailments that affect the respiratory system, including the airways and other structures of the lung. Some of the most common are asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), respiratory allergies, occupational lung diseases, and pulmonary hypertension. Asthma, which affects an estimated 235 million people and is the most common disease among children, is characterized by recurrent bouts of shortness of breath and wheezing.

COPD, which includes emphysema and chronic bronchitis, is characterized by partial blockage of the airways and destruction of the air sacs, making breathing difficult.

RISK FACTORS

Chronic lung disease is largely preventable. Tobacco use remains the most important risk factor, and use

among women and young adults is still increasing in some areas. Indoor air pollution from poorly ventilated burning of solid fuels for cooking and heating is another major risk factor, especially for women and children in low- and middle-income countries. Long-term exposure to environmental irritants such as chemical fumes, dust, and outdoor air pollution also puts people around the world at risk for developing many types of chronic lung diseases or exacerbating pre-existing respiratory illnesses. Avoiding exposure to cigarette smoke, including secondhand smoke, and environmental pollutants is one of the most effective ways to avoid or delay the onset of lung diseases.

Major chronic lung diseases risk factors:

- *Tobacco usage, including secondhand smoke*
- *Indoor air pollution*
- *Environmental toxins*
- *Serious childhood lung disease*

SCREENING AND TREATMENT

Because chronic lung disease develops slowly and worsens over time, it is often not recognized until the disease has progressed to a more advanced stage. Common symptoms include coughing and shortness of breath that interfere with normal movement. Usually, people with a lung disease lose weight and become weaker. A simple and non-invasive breathing test to test lung function can diagnose many types of chronic lung diseases. Although most lung diseases are not completely reversible, a range of treatments can help patients with daily management and improve quality of life. Doctors may prescribe medication, physical therapy, smoking cessation, and/or oxygen.