

Message from the Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia Region, on the occasion of World Heart Day 2015

29 September 2015



Cardiovascular diseases, including heart disease and stroke, are the world's number one killers, claiming 17.5 million lives a year globally. In the WHO South-East Asia Region, cardiovascular diseases cause an estimated 3.7 million deaths annually, or one fourth of all deaths. One third of these deaths from cardiovascular diseases are premature and occur among those aged less than 70 years. The good news is that the majority of premature deaths due to cardiovascular disease can be prevented through simple measures, such as consuming a healthy diet, engaging in regular physical activity, avoiding tobacco and alcohol, and by managing stress.

The theme for World Heart Day on 29 September 2015 – *"Healthy heart choices for everyone, everywhere"* – is a reminder of the impact that our environments can have on our ability to make the best choice for a healthy heart. It is a call to all sectors of government and society to create heart-healthy environments and provide heart-healthy choices for all individuals, where they live, work and play. Examples of heart healthy environments include the availability of healthy food, smoke-free zones and avenues for physical activity. Such heart-healthy choices can be provided in public spaces, schools, workplaces and communities.

On World Heart Day, this year, WHO is also calling on countries to take action to reduce heart disease in women. Although cardiovascular diseases are a major health problem among women, these remain under-recognized and under-treated. Risk factors for heart disease in women mirror those in men and include lifestyle factors such as tobacco use, overweight and obesity, harmful alcohol use and physical inactivity, as well as physiological risk factors such as elevated blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes mellitus. Additionally, in the South-East Asia Region, exposure to household air pollution from using solid fuels for cooking substantially increases the risk of heart disease in women. On average, almost 60% of households in the Region use solid fuels as a primary source for cooking. Cohesive action and collaboration are needed beyond the health sector to provide a heart-healthy environment and heart-healthy choices for women to reduce their risk of cardiovascular disease. Health-care providers should also be alert in recognizing and managing cardiovascular disease risk in women.

The WHO Region for South-East Asia has set a target for reducing premature mortality from cardiovascular disease and other noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) by 25% by 2025 and has developed a regional action plan to achieve this target. The inclusion of NCDs in the post-2015 agenda for sustainable development is a turning point and should add further momentum in reducing the burden of cardiovascular diseases and other NCDs.

On World Heart Day, 29 September 2015, I am pleased to reaffirm WHO's strong commitment to work with its partners to intensify actions to effectively address the rising burden of cardiovascular diseases and other noncommunicable diseases in the Region.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Poonam Khetrpal Singh', written in a cursive style.

Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh
Regional Director