

Heart disease, stroke and diabetes among major causes of death: study

ISLAMABAD: Heart disease, stroke, pulmonary diseases, diabetes and kidney infections are the five major causes of death in Pakistan, according to the findings of the Global Burden of Disease Study carried out at the Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington in the United States.

Pakistan currently has the lowest average age in the region. The study found that the largest contributors to the increase in health loss, measured by the number of years lost due to ill health or early death, are neonatal disorders, heart disease, diabetes and stroke. Obesity is also going to become a major challenge for Pakistan.

The study suggested that the average age in developed countries, which has increased over the years, may start to decrease due to obesity. Diseases and outdoor air pollution over the past 30 years have created a perfect storm, fuelling Covid-19 deaths, the study said.

The Global Burden of Disease Study was published in the prominent medical journal The Lancet. It was conducted with a number of organisations in 204 countries; the Pakistan Health Services Academy and Aga Khan University (AKU) collaborated as well.

It also said that among major non-communicable diseases (NCD) risks, only smoking has declined substantially. Major efforts to implement international tobacco control policies have seen exposure to smoking fall by nearly 10pc worldwide since 2010.

AKU Department of Medicine Chairwoman Dr Zainab Samad told Dawn that although some advancements have been seen over the years in terms of communicable diseases, NCDs are a major issue because they carry 60pc of the load of overall diseases in Pakistan.

"Blood pressure, cardiovascular diseases, obesity, cancer, stroke and diabetes are major diseases. In Pakistan, some focus has been given on primary health services but unfortunately people do not have awareness that physical activities are important for their health and there is need to change the behaviour of masses," she said.

Dr Samad said that the Covid-19 has proved that there was little to no attention given to chronic diseases.

University of Health Sciences Vice Chancellor Dr Javed Akram said he agreed with the study. He said Pakistan had twice the burden of diseases, meaning that people suffer from communicable and non-communicable diseases simultaneously.

"The infant mortality rate is unacceptably high in Pakistan. According to our study 17pc of the population in Pakistan is suffering with diabetes and it can increase to 25pc in the next five to seven years. Every second Pakistani is hypertensive, which becomes the reason of heart diseases, stroke and kidney failure," he said.

Dr Akram said that obesity is becoming a new problem because of peoples' lifestyles and the consumption of junk food.

"Our parks are disappearing, walking tracks are encroached on and people prefer to travel in their vehicles rather than use public transport. They use elevators rather than stairs, the young generation uses energy drinks but don't bother to burn the calories," he said.

Covid-19 deaths globally

According to the study, the latest global disease estimates reveal a perfect storm of rising chronic diseases and public health failures fuelling the Covid-19 pandemic. The study analysed 286 causes of death, 369 diseases and injuries, and 87 risk factors in 204 countries and territories, which revealed how well the world's population were prepared in terms of underlying health for the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.