



*In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful*

**Message from**

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**REGIONAL DIRECTOR**

**WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION**

**to the**

**WORLD ASTHMA DAY**

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Chronic noncommunicable diseases, including chronic respiratory diseases, constitute an increasing public health problem that imposes a substantial burden on individuals and families in Eastern Mediterranean Region. In 2005, WHO estimated that chronic respiratory diseases accounted for 8% to 10% of global deaths and 4% of the global burden of disease. These figures are projected to increase in the next 10 years if urgent action is not taken.

Asthma is the most common chronic respiratory disease, especially among children. Although asthma has a relatively low fatality rate compared to other chronic diseases, nonetheless, according to WHO estimates, 300 million people worldwide suffer from asthma and 255 000 people died of asthma in 2005. Asthma occurs in all countries, regardless of level of development. Over 80% of asthma deaths occur in developing countries.

While asthma is mostly under-diagnosed and under-treated, particularly in children, the available evidence suggests that about 8% of the population in the Eastern Mediterranean Region suffers from asthma, causing high morbidity and significant mortality.

The consequence of asthma is huge. Asthmatic people are less able to work or look after their families. Children with asthma are likely to miss a significant part of their education. Furthermore, medicine costs, emergency visits, hospitalization and inappropriate treatments are a huge financial drain on families and struggling health systems. The direct costs of asthma treatment (hospitals and medicines) account for 1% to 3% of total medical expenses in most

countries. The estimated annual medicine cost of treating asthma is estimated to be around 2 million US dollars.

Smoke, such as tobacco smoke or smoke from wood-burning or kerosene stoves and fires, aerosol sprays, strong odours, such as perfumes and fumes from carbon fuels, and dust and air pollution are very serious triggers for asthma. The WHO STEPwise survey showed that, smoking prevalence among males in the Islamic Republic of Iran was 24%. It is therefore important not to allow smoking at home or in cars and always to promote smoke-free public areas.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

WHO has developed a strategy for prevention and control of asthma. The aim of the strategy is to support Member States in their efforts to reduce the disability and premature death. This can be achieved through primary prevention to reduce the level of exposure to common risk factors, in particular tobacco smoke, frequent lower respiratory infections during childhood and air pollution, (whether indoor, outdoor or due to occupational exposure. Other approaches include strengthening the role of primary health care to provide a coordinated, standardized and simplified approach for the integrated management of patients with respiratory symptoms; identifying cost-effective interventions; and upgrading standards and accessibility of care at different levels of the health care system. Several countries have published national guidelines for management of chronic respiratory conditions.

In 2006, WHO launched the Global Alliance against Chronic Respiratory Diseases to raise awareness of the health impact and societal costs of chronic respiratory diseases, to strengthen existing programmes, and to develop new tools for the surveillance, prevention and control of chronic respiratory diseases, including asthma.

Appropriate response to asthma requires countries to develop comprehensive national asthma control programmes, to assess the magnitude of the problem through a standardized technique, and to focus on primary prevention through reduction of exposure to known risk factors, particularly indoor smoke and in the workplace environment. Development of management guidelines to improve asthma control is a necessity at the national level and is likely to result in better care of asthmatic patients.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you all know World Asthma Day aims to help in raising awareness and promoting change to reduce the burden of asthma and improve asthma management. This year the theme will emphasize management of asthma—“You Can Control Your Asthma”—and addresses the opportunities for improved control of asthma.

In this context, emphasis on building and developing the infrastructure for the diagnosis and management of chronic respiratory diseases, including asthma, is important and should be among the priorities on any public health agenda.

Again, it is highly recommended that asthma should always be managed at the primary health care level. To this end primary health care professionals, as well as patients, need to be empowered to improve asthma control. Partnership between the community and health care providers is essential to ensure the active participation of patients in managing their asthma.

Finally, I would like to congratulate the Iranian Society of Asthma and Allergy for their continuous efforts to reduce the burden of asthma in our Region and I assure you of our full support.

Thank you.