Geneva, 14 September -- A new **World Health Organization** (WHO) report features information about the **noncommunicable diseases** (NCDs) situation in 193 countries, as global leaders prepare to meet at the United Nations high-level meeting on noncommunicable diseases in New York, 19-20 September 2011.

"This report indicates where each government needs to focus to prevent and treat the four major killers: cancer, heart disease and stroke, lung disease and diabetes," says Dr Ala Alwan, Assistant Director-General for Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health at WHO.

The report includes details of what proportion of each country's deaths are due to noncommunicable diseases. Using graphs in a page-per country presentation format, the report provides information on prevalence, trends in metabolic risk factors (cholesterol, blood pressure, body mass index and blood sugar) alongside data on the country's capacity to tackle the diseases.

Noncommunicable diseases are the top cause of death worldwide, killing more than 36 million people in 2008. Cardiovascular diseases were responsible for 48% of these deaths, cancers 21%, chronic respiratory diseases 12%, and diabetes 3%.

"Premature" deaths

In 2008, more than 9 million of all deaths attributed to NCDs occurred before the age of 60; 90% of these "premature" deaths occurred in low and middle income countries. One of the findings shows that men and women in low-income countries are around three times more likely to die of NCDs before the age of sixty than in high-income countries.

According to these estimates, the proportion of men dying under the age of 60 from NCDs can be as high as 67%. Among women under 60, the highest proportion was 58%.

The lowest rates of mortality from noncommunicable diseases for men under 60 were 8% and for women under 60 it was 6%.

Risk factors

The profiles report on the proportion of people who smoke and are physically inactive. They also indicate trends for four factors that increase people's risk of developing these diseases, blood pressure, cholesterol, body mass index and blood sugar over the past 30 years.

In the United States of America, for example, 87% of all deaths are due to noncommunicable diseases. 16% of the population smokes and 43% are physically inactive. On average, blood pressure has decreased since 1980; body mass index has increased; and glucose levels have risen.

Overall, the trends indicate that in many high income countries, action to reduce blood pressure and cholesterol is having an impact, but there is a need to do more on body mass index and managing diabetes.

Countries' capacity to prevent and treat noncommunicable diseases

The profiles show what countries are doing to tackle noncommunicable diseases in terms of institutional capacity, specified funding, and actions to address the four main diseases and their associated risk factors.

The report also highlights what all countries need to do to reduce people's exposure to risk factors and improve services to prevent and treat noncommunicable diseases.

UN high-level meeting on noncommunicable diseases

The UN meeting will highlight the importance of setting targets for progress. This report provides all countries with a baseline for monitoring epidemiological trends and assessing the progress they are making to address noncommunicable diseases. The WHO plans to issue an updated report in 2013.