World Cancer Day 2011

New physical activity guidance can help reduce risk of breast, colon cancers

4 February, 2011 | **Geneva --** Undertaking 150 minutes a week of moderate physical activity can reduce the risk of breast and colon cancers, according to the new *Global Recommendations on Physical Activity for Health* released by the World Health Organization (WHO) today on World Cancer Day.

"Physical activity has a strong role to play in reducing the incidence of certain cancers," says Dr Ala Alwan, WHO's Assistant Director-General for Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health. "Physical inactivity is the fourth leading risk factor for all global deaths, with 31% of the world's population not physically active."

In 2008, almost 460,000 females died from breast cancer, while close to 610,000 males and females died from colorectal cancer .

The new recommendations advise that at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic physical activity throughout the week for people aged 18 and over can reduce the risk of noncommunicable diseases, including breast and colon cancers, diabetes and heart disease. For 5-17 year-olds, at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity can protect their health and, in turn, reduce the risk of these diseases.

Physical inactivity is increasing in many countries and has major implications for these cancers, along with other noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) such as cardiovascular diseases

and diabetes. Physical inactivity is associated with:

- 3.2 million deaths per year, including 2.6 million in low- and middle-income countries,
- over 670 000 premature deaths (people aged under 60 years), and
- around 30% of diabetes and ischaemic heart disease burden.

The international community must also place focus on research for additional factors contributing to cancer. The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), the specialized cancer agency of WHO, is leading efforts into studying cancer risk factors.

Professor Chris Wild, Director of IARC, says: "Physical inactivity is one risk factor for noncommunicable diseases, which is modifiable and therefore of great potential public health significance. Changing the level of physical activity raises challenges for the individual but also at societal level."

World Cancer Day was initiated in 2005 by the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC). It falls this year in the lead-up to 19-20 September, 2011, United Nations General Assembly High-level Meeting on the Prevention and Control of cancers and the three other deadliest types of noncommunicable diseases (cardiovascular diseases, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes). These four diseases cause more than 60% of all global deaths, equivalent to more than 35 million annually.

Dr Eduardo Cazap, President of the UICC, says: "The UN NCDs summit is a historic opportunity to establish governmental commitment on implementing programs that will prevent millions of people suffering and dying from cancer and other chronic diseases. NCDs are dramatically increasing, particularly in developing countries where nearly 80% of deaths occur. Sadly, changing ways of life, such as reduced physical activity, are making people unhealthier and, in turn, prone to such diseases as cancer."

The physical activity recommendations were produced, in part, to provide WHO Member States with the evidence base needed to make policies for physical activity programmes to promote good health. Most countries, particularly low- and middle-income, do not have national physical activity guidelines.

Worldwide, lung, breast, stomach, liver and colorectal cancers cause the most cancer deaths

each year. The majority of all cancer deaths occurred in less developed regions in 2008 and without action this is expected to increase in coming decades.

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