GENEVA - 16 May 2012 **–** *The* ***World Health Statistics 2012*** **report**, released today, puts the spotlight on the growing problem of the
noncommunicable diseases burden
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One in three adults worldwide, according to the report, has raised blood pressure – a condition that causes around half of all deaths from stroke and heart disease. One in ten adults has diabetes.

"This report is further evidence of the dramatic increase in the conditions that trigger heart disease and other chronic illnesses, particularly in low- and middle-income countries," says Dr Margaret Chan, Director-General of WHO. "In some African countries, as much as half the adult population has high blood pressure."

For the first time, the World Health Organization's annual statistics report includes information from 194 countries on the percentage of men and women with raised blood pressure and blood glucose levels.

In high-income countries, widespread diagnosis and treatment with low-cost medication have significantly reduced mean blood pressure across populations – and this has contributed to a reduction in deaths from heart disease. In Africa, however, more than 40% (and up to 50%) of adults in many countries are estimated to have high blood pressure. Most of these people remain undiagnosed, although many of these cases could be treated with low-cost medications, which would significantly reduce the risk of death and disability from heart disease and stroke.

Also included for the first time in the *World Health Statistics 2012* are data on people with raised blood glucose levels. While the global average prevalence is around 10%, up to one third of populations in some Pacific Island countries have this condition. Left untreated, diabetes can lead to cardiovascular disease, blindness and kidney failure.

Obesity is another major issue.

“In every region of the world, obesity doubled between 1980 and 2008,” says Dr Ties Boerma, Director of the Department of Health Statistics and Information Systems at WHO. “Today, half a billion people (12% of the world’s population) are considered obese.”

The highest obesity levels are in the WHO Region of the Americas (26% of adults) and the lowest in the WHO South-East Asia Region (3% obese). In all parts of the world, women are more likely to be obese than men, and thus at greater risk of diabetes, cardiovascular disease and some cancers.

Noncommunicable diseases currently cause almost two thirds of all deaths worldwide. Global concern about the rise in numbers of deaths from heart and lung disease, diabetes and cancer prompted the United Nations to hold a high-level meeting on noncommunicable diseases in New York in September 2011.

The World Health Assembly, to be held in Geneva from 21-26 May 2012, will review progress made since that meeting and agree on next steps. Work is currently under way to develop a global monitoring framework and a set of voluntary targets for prevention and control of these diseases.

Published annually by WHO, the *World Health Statistics* is the most comprehensive publication of health-related global statistics available. It contains data from 194 countries on a range of mortality, disease and health system indicators including life expectancy, illnesses and deaths from a range of diseases, health services and treatments, financial investment in health, as well as risk factors and behaviours that affect health.

Some key trends in this year’s report include:

- **Maternal mortality:** In 20 years, the number of maternal deaths has decreased from more than 540 000 deaths in 1990 to less than 290 000 in 2010 – a decline of 47%. One third of these maternal deaths occur in just two countries – India with 20% of the global total and Nigeria with 14%.
- **10 year trends for causes of child death:** Data from the years 2000 to 2010 show how public health advancements have helped save children's lives in the past decade. The world has made significant progress, having reduced the number of child deaths from almost 10 million children aged less than 5 years in 2000 to 7.6 million annual deaths in 2010. Declines in numbers of deaths from diarrhoeal disease and measles have been particularly striking.

- **Death registration:** Only 34 countries (representing 15% of the world's population) produce high-quality cause-of-death data. In low and middle-income countries, less than 10% of deaths are registered.

World Health Statistics 2012 is available in English, French and Spanish: http://who.int/entity/gho/publications/world_health_statistics/2012/en/index.html
and through WHO's Global Health Observatory:
www.who.int/gho

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