World Lung Day 2019: Respiratory Groups Unite to Call for Healthy Lungs for All

Cape Town, Glenview, Lausanne, Montevideo, New York, Paris, Tokyo, 25 September 2019

Today, on World Lung Day (WLD), the Pan African Thoracic Society is united with members of the Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS) and WLD partner organisations to advocate for respiratory health globally and call on policymakers to ensure that everyone has access to the services they need to improve their lung health.

Respiratory diseases impose an immense worldwide health burden. The facts are shocking:

- 29 million African people suffer from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). The global figure is 384 million, with 3 million deaths from it each year, making it the third leading cause of death worldwide.
- 2.4 million African people develop tuberculosis and 665,000 die from it each year on the continent. With 1.6 million global deaths per year, it is the most common lethal infectious disease.
- 62,000 African people die from lung cancer each year. With an estimated 1.76 million global deaths in 2018, it is the deadliest cancer.
- 119 million African people suffer from asthma, making it the most common chronic disease of childhood. It affects 15 percent of children in Africa – and is rising.
- Pneumonia kills 490,000 children in sub-Saharan Africa each year making it a leading cause of death in the very young and very old.
- The majority of Africa’s population live in places where poor air quality exceeds WHO guidelines.

WLD, on 25th September, comes two days after the UN High-Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage (UHC). UHC calls for all people to receive the health services they need, when they need it, without suffering financial hardship. At least half of the world’s population still do not have full coverage of essential health services.

The global spotlight on UHC represents an opportunity for substantial progress in the fight against lung disease around the world. On WLD this year we are united in our message: ‘Leave no one behind. On World Lung Day, we call for healthy lungs for all.’

“UHC is particularly important to persons with respiratory disease. For example, a break in the supply of medicine for patients with tuberculosis could cause the development of drug resistance, which carries serious consequences. The abrupt unavailability of asthma medicine could cause severe suffering and even death. Lack of health care provider availability usually means delay in diagnosis, which could be fatal for lung cancer patients,” said Dean Schraufnagel, MD, Executive Director of FIRS.

FIRS call for UHC action through:

2. Prioritising prevention, namely tobacco, as well as air pollution, and vaccinations.
3. Maintaining a continuous supply of essential medicines.
4. Stemming antibiotic resistance

In addition, FIRS call for these essential actions to reduce the burden of respiratory disease and improve global health:

1. Increase awareness among the public and policy makers that respiratory health is a major component of global health.
2. Reduce the use of all tobacco products through universal enforcement of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.
3. Adopt and require World Health Organization air quality standards to reduce ambient, indoor, and occupational air pollution for all countries.
4. Promote universal access to quality health care, essential medicines, and immunisations.
5. Improve early diagnosis of respiratory diseases through increasing public awareness of lung health and disease.
6. Increase training of health professionals worldwide in respiratory disease.
7. Standardise the monitoring and management of respiratory diseases with evidence-based national and international strategies.
8. Increase research to prevent and treat respiratory diseases.

“We hope World Lung Day will provide an opportunity for action, conversation, and awareness. A unified voice of all dedicated to respiratory health will be a powerful force,” concludes Dr. Schraufnagel.

To learn more about World Lung Day go to our World Lung Day Toolkit.

About the Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS)
The Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS) is an organisation comprised of the world's leading international respiratory societies working together to improve lung health globally: American College of Chest Physicians (CHEST), American Thoracic Society (ATS), Asian Pacific Society of Respirology (APSR), Asociación Latino Americana De Tórax (ALAT), European Respiratory Society (ERS), International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Diseases (The Union), Pan African Thoracic Society (PATS), Global Initiative for Asthma (GINA), and the Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease (GOLD).

The goal of FIRS is to unify and enhance efforts to improve lung health through the combined work of its more than 70,000 members globally.

For more information about FIRS please contact Lisa Roscoe lisa.roscoe@firsnet.org.
Fact Sheet – World Lung Day 2019

Lung Health Facts

• 29 million African people suffer from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). The global figure is 384 million with 3 million deaths from it each year, making it the third leading cause of death worldwide [1].

• 2.4 million African people develop tuberculosis and 665,000 die from it each year on the continent. With 1.6 million global deaths each year, it is the most common lethal infectious disease [2].

• 62,000 African people die from lung cancer each year. With an estimated 1.76 million global deaths in 2018, it is the deadliest cancer [3].

• 119 million African people suffer from asthma [1].

• Asthma is the most common chronic disease of childhood, affecting 15 percent of children on the continent – and rising [1].

• Pneumonia kills 490,000 children in sub-Saharan Africa each year, making it the leading cause of death in the very young and very old.

• Every minute, 2 children under 5 years old die from pneumonia globally [4].

• 80 percent of pneumonia deaths are in children under 2 years [4].

• Most (99 percent) deaths occur in low or middle-income countries [4]

• Passive smoke exposure also leads to respiratory disease. Since 1964, about 2.5 million non-smokers died from health problems caused by exposure to second-hand smoke [1].

• 4.2 million people die every year as a result of exposure to ambient (outdoor) air pollution [5].

• 3.8 million people die every year as a result of household exposure to smoke from dirty cookstoves and fuels [5].

• The majority of Africa’s population live in places where poor air quality exceeds WHO guideline limits [5].
Respiratory Disease Prevention

- Fortunately, most respiratory diseases are PREVENTABLE by improving the quality of the air. Common sources of unhealthy air are tobacco smoke, indoor and outdoor air pollution, and air containing microbes, toxic particles, fumes, or allergens.

- Discouraging individuals from starting to smoke tobacco and encouraging smokers to quit smoking are the first and most important priorities in preventing COPD.

- Asthmatics who smoke have a more rapid decline in lung function than lifelong non-smokers.

- Avoiding smoking during pregnancy and avoidance of passive smoke exposure after birth can reduce asthma severity in children.

- Reducing air pollution saves lives and reduces the risk of many diseases.

- Vaccinations are essential for the control and elimination of many childhood respiratory diseases.

- Controlling unhealthy air in the workplace can prevent occupational lung disease.

- Most cases of TB can be cured if diagnosed early and treated appropriately.

- Lung cancer is largely preventable through tobacco control.

- Environmental causes of lung cancer, such as air pollution, radon, and asbestos, can be monitored and reduced.

The respiratory societies of the world believe that everyone has the right to breathe clean air and we ask lawmakers to enact and ensure clean air standards in all countries.

Universal Health Coverage

- At least half of the world’s population still do not have full coverage of essential health services [6].

- About 100 million people are still being pushed into extreme poverty because they have to pay for health care [6].

- Over 800 million people (almost 12 percent of the world’s population) spent at least 10 percent of their household budgets to pay for health care [6].
To improve respiratory health globally, we need to ensure that everyone has access to the services they need to improve their lung health.

A break in the supply of medicine for a patient with tuberculosis could cause the development of drug resistance, which carries serious consequences.

The abrupt unavailability of asthma medicine could cause severe suffering and even death.

Lack of health care provider availability usually means delay in diagnosis, which could be fatal for lung cancer patients.

References

2. WHO, Tuberculosis.
3. WHO, Cancer.
5. WHO, Pollution.

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The goal of FIRS is to unify and enhance efforts to improve lung health through the combined work of the world respiratory health organisations, professionals and their patients.

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