

Media centre

The top 10 causes of death

Leading causes of death by economy income group

More than half (52%) of all deaths in low-income countries in 2015 were caused by the so-called “Group I” conditions, which include communicable diseases, maternal causes, conditions arising during pregnancy and childbirth, and nutritional deficiencies. By contrast, less than 7% of deaths in high-income countries were due to such causes. Lower respiratory infections were among the leading causes of death across all income groups.

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) caused 70% of deaths globally, ranging from 37% in low-income countries to 88% in high-income countries. All but 1 of the 10 leading causes of death in high-income countries were NCDs. In terms of absolute number of deaths, however, 78% of global NCD deaths occurred in low- and middle-income countries.

Injuries claimed nearly 5 million lives in 2015. More than a quarter (27%) of these deaths were due to road traffic injuries. Low-income countries had the highest mortality rate due to road traffic injuries with 28.5 deaths per 100 000 population – the global rate was 18.3. Road injuries were also among the leading 10 causes of death in both lower-middle- and upper-middle-income countries.

