



# THE TOP TEN CAUSES OF DEATH

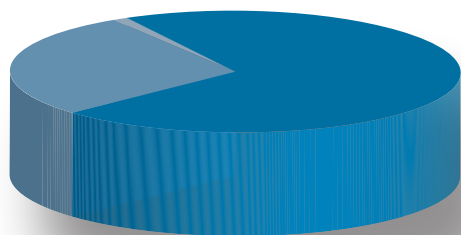
## THE TEN LEADING CAUSES OF DEATH BY BROAD INCOME GROUP 2002

| High-income countries                     | Deaths in millions | % of deaths |
|---|--------------------|-------------|
| Coronary heart disease                    | 1.34               | 17.1        |
| Stroke and other cerebrovascular diseases | 0.77               | 9.8         |
| Trachea, bronchus, lung cancers           | 0.46               | 5.8         |
| Lower respiratory infections              | 0.34               | 4.3         |
| Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease     | 0.30               | 3.9         |
| Colon and rectal cancers                  | 0.26               | 3.3         |
| Alzheimer and other dementias             | 0.22               | 2.7         |
| Diabetes mellitus                         | 0.22               | 2.7         |
| Breast cancer                             | 0.15               | 1.9         |
| Stomach cancer                            | 0.14               | 1.8         |

| Middle-income countries                   | Deaths in millions | % of deaths |
|---|--------------------|-------------|
| Stroke and other cerebrovascular diseases | 3.02               | 14.6        |
| Coronary heart disease                    | 2.77               | 13.4        |
| Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease     | 1.57               | 7.6         |
| Lower respiratory infection               | 0.69               | 3.3         |
| HIV/AIDS                                  | 0.62               | 3.0         |
| Perinatal conditions                      | 0.60               | 2.9         |
| Stomach cancer                            | 0.58               | 2.8         |
| Trachea, bronchus, lung cancers           | 0.57               | 2.7         |
| Road traffic accidents                    | 0.55               | 2.6         |
| Hypertensive heart disease                | 0.54               | 2.6         |

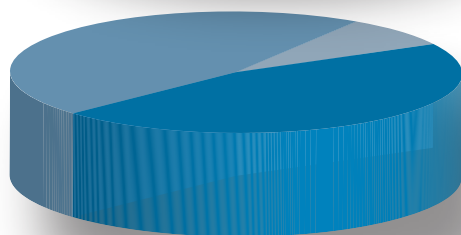
| Low-income countries                      | Deaths in millions | % of deaths |
|---|--------------------|-------------|
| Coronary heart disease                    | 3.10               | 10.8        |
| Lower respiratory infections              | 2.86               | 10.0        |
| HIV/AIDS                                  | 2.14               | 7.5         |
| Perinatal conditions                      | 1.83               | 6.4         |
| Stroke and other cerebrovascular diseases | 1.72               | 6.0         |
| Diarrhoeal diseases                       | 1.54               | 5.4         |
| Malaria                                   | 1.24               | 4.4         |
| Tuberculosis                              | 1.10               | 3.8         |
| Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease     | 0.88               | 3.1         |
| Road traffic accidents                    | 0.53               | 1.9         |

### DEATH TRENDS BY AGE



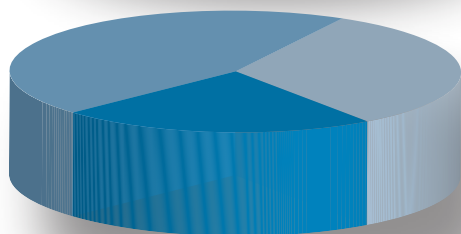
**High-income countries:**

70%  
29%  
1%



**Middle-income countries:**

44%  
46%  
10%

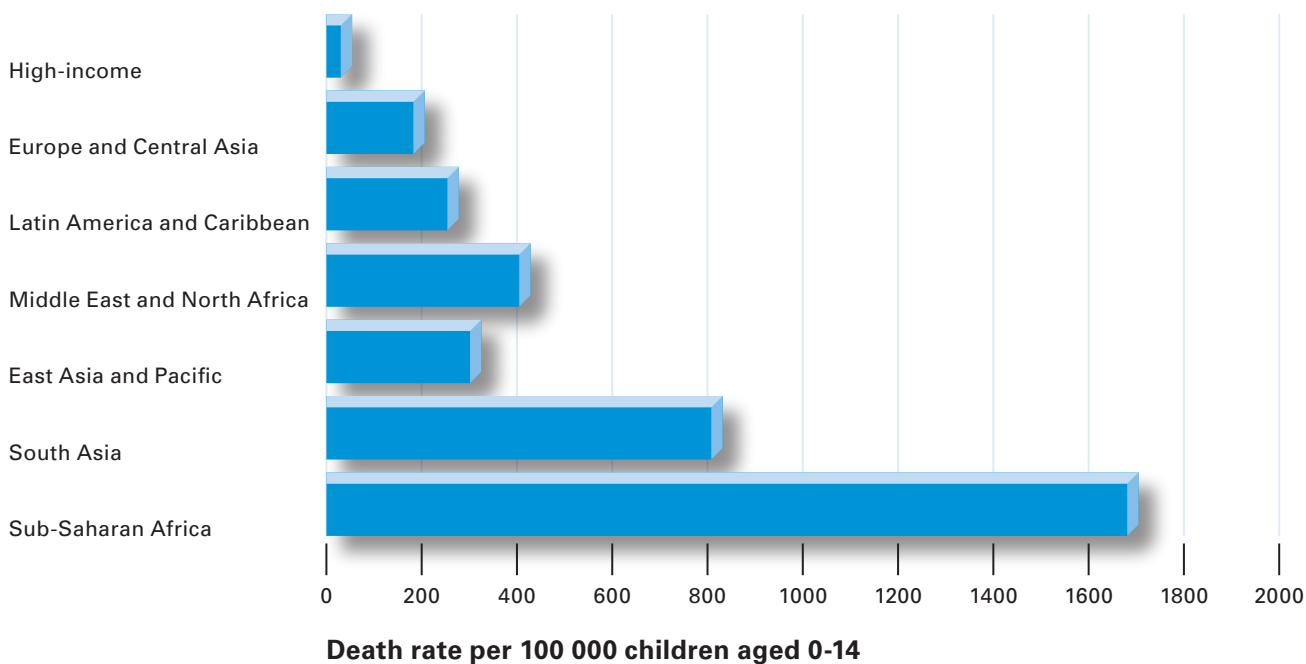


**Low-income countries:**

22%  
44%  
34%

■ Deaths among people over 70 
 ■ Deaths among people 15-69 
 ■ Deaths among people 0-14

### DEATHS AMONG CHILDREN: AN IMBALANCED PICTURE



## MAJOR CAUSES OF DEATH: A PRIMER

### Q: How many people die every year?

During 2002, an estimated 57 million people died.

### Q: What is the number one cause of death throughout the world?

Cardiovascular diseases kill more people each year—in high, middle- and low-income countries alike—than any others. In 2002, 7.2 million people died of coronary heart disease, 5.5 million from stroke or another form of cerebrovascular disease.

### Q: Isn't smoking a top cause of death?

Because it is a major cause of many of the world's top killer diseases—including cardiovascular disease, chronic obstructive lung disease and lung cancer—tobacco use is responsible for the death of one in ten adults worldwide. Smoking is often the hidden cause of the disease recorded as responsible for a death.

### Q: What are the main differences between rich and poor countries with respect to causes of death?

In high-income countries more than two-thirds of all people live beyond the age of 70 and die of chronic diseases: cardiovascular disease, chronic obstructive lung disease, cancers, diabetes or dementia. Lung infection remains the only leading infectious cause of death.

In middle-income countries, nearly half of all people live to the age of 70 and chronic diseases are the major killers, just as they are in high-income countries. Unlike in high-income countries, however, HIV/AIDS, complications of pregnancy and childbirth and road traffic accidents also are leading causes of death.

In low-income countries less than a quarter of all people reach the age of 70, and nearly a third of all deaths are among children under 14. Although cardiovascular diseases together represent the leading cause of death in these countries, infectious diseases (above all HIV/AIDS, lung infections, tuberculosis, diarrhoeal diseases and malaria) together claim more lives. Complications of pregnancy and childbirth together continue to be a leading cause of death, claiming the lives of both infants and mothers.

### Q: How many young children die each year?

Nearly 11 million deaths in 2002 were among children under five years of age, and 98% of them were in low- and middle-income countries.

### Q: Is there relatively a lower proportion of deaths overall in rich countries than in poor countries?

Yes. About one out of six people in the world, or about 15%, live in high-income countries (chiefly in North America and Europe). But only 7% of all deaths annually occur in those countries.

## WHY COUNTING THE DEAD MATTERS

Measuring how many people die each year and why they have died is one of the most important means—along with gauging how various diseases and injuries are affecting the living—at assessing the effectiveness of a country's health system. Having those numbers helps health authorities determine whether they are focussing on the right kinds of public health actions. A country where deaths from heart disease and diabetes rapidly rise over a period of a few years, for example, has a strong interest in starting a vigorous programme to encourage lifestyles that will help prevent these illnesses. Similarly, if a country recognizes that many children are dying of malaria, but only a small portion of the health budget is dedicated to providing effective treatment, an adjustment can be made.

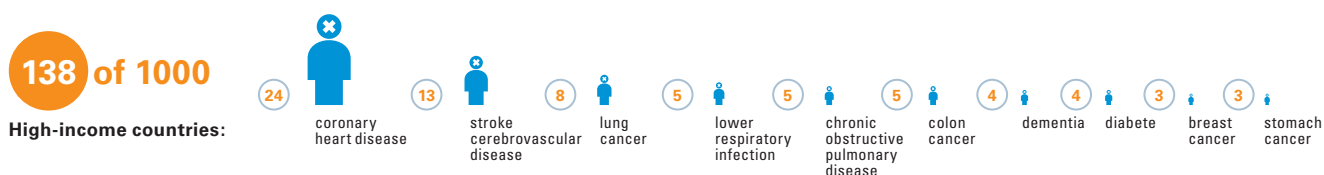
Industrialized countries have systems in place for assessing causes of death in the population. Most developing countries do not have such systems, and the numbers of deaths from specific causes have to be estimated from incomplete data. It is widely acknowledged that progress in this realm is crucial for improving health and reducing preventable deaths in the developing world.

## DEATHS ACROSS THE GLOBE: AN OVERVIEW

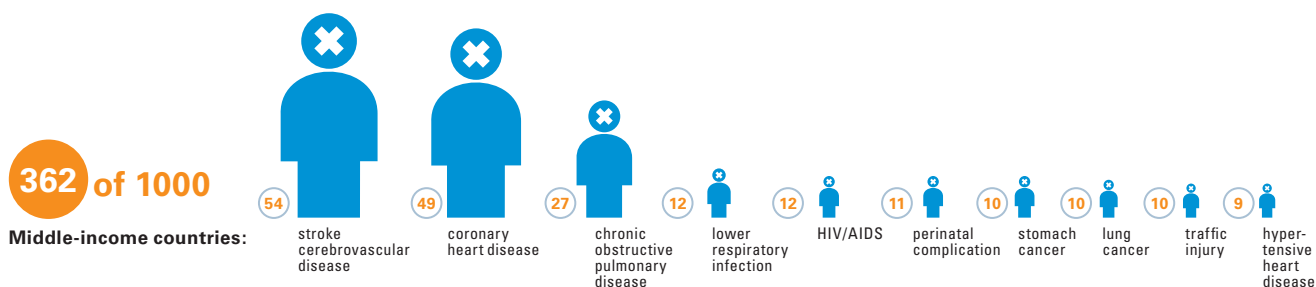
Imagine a diverse international group of 1000 individuals representative of the women, men and children from all over the globe who died in 2002. Of those 1000 people, 138 would have come from high-income countries, 362 from middle-income countries and 501 from low-income countries.

### WHAT WOULD BE THE TOP TEN CAUSES OF THEIR DEATHS?

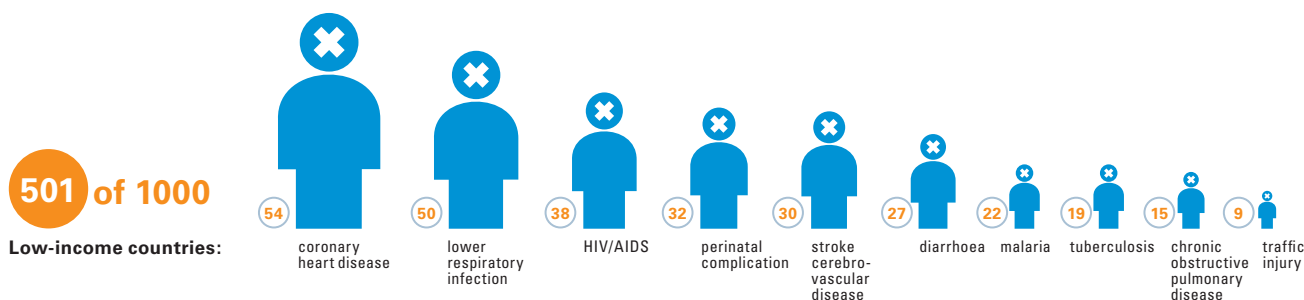
**Among the 138 people from high-income countries,** 24 would have died from coronary heart disease, 13 from stroke or other cerebrovascular diseases, eight from lung cancer, five from a lower respiratory infection, five from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, mostly caused by smoking, five from colon or rectal cancer, four each from dementia or diabetes and three each from breast or stomach cancer.



**Of the 362 people from middle-income countries,** 54 people would have died from stroke or other cerebrovascular diseases, 49 from coronary heart disease, 27 from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Twelve people each would have died from lower respiratory infection and HIV/AIDS. Eleven infants would have died from perinatal complications-conditions arising during pregnancy and childbirth, mainly low birth weight and birth trauma. Ten people would have died from stomach cancer, lung cancer or a road traffic injury. And nine would have died from hypertensive heart disease.



**Of the 501 people from low-income countries,** 54 people would have died from coronary heart disease. Fifty people, 31 of them under the age of 14, would have died from a lower respiratory infection. HIV/AIDS would have carried off 38 people. Thirty-two infants would have died from perinatal conditions. Thirty people would have died of stroke or other cerebrovascular diseases. Twenty-seven people, 24 of them under the age of 14, would have died of diarrhoea. Twenty-two would have died from malaria, 19 from tuberculosis, 15 because of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and nine because of a road traffic injury.



## THE TEN LEADING CAUSES OF DEATH BY BROAD INCOME GROUP 2005 PROJECTIONS

| High-income countries                     | Deaths in millions | % of deaths |
|---|--------------------|-------------|
| Coronary heart disease                    | 1.38               | 16.9        |
| Stroke and other cerebrovascular diseases | 0.77               | 9.5         |
| Trachea, bronchus, lung cancers           | 0.47               | 5.8         |
| Lower respiratory infections              | 0.34               | 4.2         |
| Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease     | 0.32               | 3.9         |
| Colon and rectal cancers                  | 0.27               | 3.3         |
| Diabetes mellitus                         | 0.24               | 2.9         |
| Alzheimer and other dementias             | 0.23               | 2.8         |
| Breast cancer                             | 0.15               | 1.8         |
| Stomach cancer                            | 0.15               | 1.8         |

| Middle-income countries                   | Deaths in millions | % of deaths |
|---|--------------------|-------------|
| Stroke and other cerebrovascular diseases | 3.14               | 14.8        |
| Coronary heart disease                    | 2.90               | 13.7        |
| Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease     | 1.72               | 8.1         |
| HIV/AIDS                                  | 0.75               | 3.5         |
| Trachea, bronchus, lung cancers           | 0.62               | 2.9         |
| Stomach cancer                            | 0.62               | 2.9         |
| Lower respiratory infection               | 0.62               | 2.9         |
| Road traffic accidents                    | 0.60               | 2.8         |
| Hypertensive heart disease                | 0.55               | 2.6         |
| Perinatal conditions                      | 0.52               | 2.5         |

| Low-income countries                      | Deaths in millions | % of deaths |
|---|--------------------|-------------|
| Coronary heart disease                    | 3.29               | 11.4        |
| Lower respiratory infections              | 2.72               | 9.5         |
| HIV/AIDS                                  | 2.06               | 7.2         |
| Stroke and other cerebrovascular diseases | 1.83               | 6.4         |
| Perinatal conditions                      | 1.78               | 6.2         |
| Diarrhoeal diseases                       | 1.48               | 5.2         |
| Tuberculosis                              | 1.01               | 3.5         |
| Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease     | 0.97               | 3.4         |
| Malaria                                   | 0.87               | 3.0         |
| Road traffic accidents                    | 0.60               | 2.1         |