



Hong Kong Lung Foundation



Hong Kong Thoracic Society



American College of Chest Physicians  
(Hong Kong & Macau Chapter)

# PRESS RELEASE

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## Respiratory diseases – the number one killer and ticking time bomb in Hong Kong

HKCEC, 9 November 2008 – The Hong Kong Thoracic Society and the American College of Chest Physicians (Hong Kong & Macau Chapter) said at the 10<sup>th</sup> Beijing / Hong Kong Medical Exchange: Update on Respiratory Medicine, respiratory diseases kill more in Hong Kong than cardiovascular diseases.

Globally and in the United Kingdom, cardiovascular disease is the number one killer according to a WHO report in 2002 and the Burden of Lung Disease Study carried out by the British Thoracic Society (BTS) in 2004. There had been no similar study in Hong Kong on the health burden of the major killers likewise. To commemorate the 10<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of the Hong Kong Lung Foundation and the Hong Kong Thoracic Society respectively, a first ever territory-wise study was carried out to analyze the pattern of death and hospitalization in 2005 to inform the government and public with a snapshot of our healthcare burden. The full report is released and published in the latest issue of *Respirology*.

“This report provides the most thorough descriptions possible of the current state of disease burden in Hong Kong together with the closest estimate of prevalence of major respiratory diseases,” said Dr. Wai-ming Chan, President of the Hong Kong Thoracic Society, “The real killer emerges to be respiratory diseases, while cardiovascular diseases come next. There were also significantly more hospital admissions due to respiratory disorders than cardiovascular diseases.”

A detailed analysis of the report revealed that in 2005 in Hong Kong, the total number of deaths from all causes was 38,683. Albeit reduction in deaths from respiratory disorders over the past decade, respiratory diseases still claimed 11,099 lives (28.7% of all death) in 2005 i.e. respiratory disease killed one in three and a half people. Cardiovascular deaths at a number of 10,078 only ranked second at 26.1%. The triad of death tolls due to respiratory diseases for both sexes was: respiratory infection (39%), respiratory tract cancer (33.2%) and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) (17.9%). In male however, more died of respiratory cancer (36.3%) than respiratory infections (33.2%) – conceivably linked to higher tobacco consumption.

The deadly impact of lung diseases is also reflected in hospital admissions. Respiratory diseases ranked top at 15.9% compared to all other causes of admissions. Cardiovascular diseases came next at 11.2%.

Among the highlights of the Report on **death and illness rates**:

- Admissions due to influenza were on the rise for the period 2001 to 2005. The Age standardized hospitalization rates increased from 7.2/100,000 in 2001 to 45.7/100,000 in 2005, at an annual increase of 14.6%.
- Smoking related lung disease took a heavy toll. Respiratory tract cancer was the second commonest cause of respiratory mortality (33.2%) followed by chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) (17.9%).
- Two studies estimated the prevalence of clinically significant COPD at 12.8% and 22.1% among smokers. Patients with COPD experienced shortness of breath as a result of smoking related lung damages. It was the second commonest cause of all hospitalization (14.6%).

Recommendations were also made by the group of researchers led by Professor Moira Chan-Yeung:

- Respiratory infections should be the main area to target preventive measures. These should include influenza and pneumococcal vaccination programme directed to high risk groups such as the elderly, children, and those with chronic diseases.
- Smoking is the single most important and preventable factor for COPD and lung cancer. Public should be well informed of the high price to pay based on data from this study. The government needs to reform its policy as the future of Hong Kong is riding on her determination on stringent tobacco control. In particular, we need to nip the problems among teenagers where a ticking time bomb exists.
- Strong association has been demonstrated between air pollution, mortality and hospitalization rates for respiratory (COPD and asthma), and cardiovascular diseases. Unless the government can appreciate its magnitude and grapple with the problem of air pollution, the public will continue to suffer from its health consequences unnecessarily.
- Against the high burden of lung diseases, there is an urgent need to train up more specialists in Respiratory Medicine.

The project was carried out in collaboration with the Hospital Authority and the Department of Health, Hong Kong and was funded by the Hong Kong Lung Foundation.

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