A new CDC report shows an astounding number of preventable deaths in America

By ACSH Staff — May 2, 2014

The CDC tallied up those deaths they determined to be preventable over the years 2008-2010, and came up with some rather remarkable and disturbing figures. Using National Vital Statistics System mortality data [1], the CDC looked at the number of observed deaths in one year, from the five leading causes of preventable death: heart disease, cancer, chronic lower respiratory diseases, stroke, and unintentional injuries. The estimates of preventable deaths was based upon using the rates of the three lowest-frequency states as a zero control, and counting the number above that ideal situation as being preventable. [2]

The number of lives that could have been saved is staggering: an estimated 91,757 deaths from heart disease, 84,443 from cancer, 28,831 from chronic lower respiratory diseases, 16,973 from stroke, and 36,836 from unintentional injuries totalling almost 260,000. The five leading causes accounted for almost 900,000 annual deaths, about two-thirds of all deaths. Thus, 29 percent of those top five-related deaths were deemed preventable; and continuing along this line, almost one-fifth of all U.S. deaths were preventable, based on this model.

In the key discussion section of the report, the authors note that reducing the number of preventable deaths requires risk factor reduction, and they specify these risk factors as follows:

Heart: tobacco, high blood pressure, elevated cholesterol, diabetes, and obesity;
Cancer: tobacco, poor diet, lack of exercise, sun exposure, hormones, alcohol, some infectious agents, and certain chemicals and other substances;
COPD: tobacco smoke, second-hand smoke, other indoor air pollutants, outdoor air pollutants, allergens and occupational agents;
Stroke: high blood pressure, elevated cholesterol, heart disease, diabetes, obesity, tobacco use, alcohol use, and inactivity;
Unintentional injury: not using vehicle restraints (seatbelts), lack of helmets, unsafe consumer products, substance abuse (including Rxs), occupational hazards.

The preventable deaths were concentrated significantly in the southeastern states. While the
writers of this report acknowledged that the majority of these risk factors do not occur randomly...they are closely aligned with the social, demographic, environmental, economic and geographical attributes of the neighborhoods where they live and work, they pointed out that the figures were not controlled for such disparities.

ACSH s Dr. Gil Ross had this perspective: The main thing that sticks out in this overview, aside from the geographical distribution s slant towards the Old South, which is clearly socioeconomically-based via risk factor disparity, is what they call tobacco. This euphemism for cigarette smoking is of course endemic among our public health officials, and it s too bad that they don t just tell it like it is: 99 percent of tobacco -related disease and preventable death is attributable to cigarettes, the highly toxic and addictive form of tobacco, the lethal nicotine-delivery device perfected by the 20th century s marketers to be an effective killing machine. This report illustrates that fact. While hypertension and cholesterol levels are also of major import, if we could reduce the toll of smoking, a good fraction of these deaths would be not preventable, but actually prevented.

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