



On World Lung Day, the Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS) Calls for Action to Tackle Global Inequity in Respiratory Health

World Lung Day 2022: *Lung Health for All*

25 September 2022

On World Lung Day, 25 September 2022, the Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS) calls on governments worldwide to address stark global inequalities in respiratory health.

The COVID-19 pandemic may have subsided, but its impact highlights a global lung health crisis that has not gone away.

Respiratory illnesses affect people in all countries, but disproportionately in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) where resources for research, prevention, and management are scarce. To address such inequity, we must look beyond medical care to the social and environmental determinants of health such as tobacco use, air pollution, climate change and poverty.

Five respiratory diseases are the commonest causes of illness and death worldwide - chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), asthma, acute respiratory tract infection or pneumonia, tuberculosis (TB) and lung cancer.

The FIRS [Global Impact of Respiratory Disease](#) report shows the immense burden of these lung diseases:

- An estimated 200 million people have **COPD**, of which about 3.2 million die each year, making it the third-leading cause of death worldwide.
- **Asthma** is one of the [commonest non-communicable diseases globally](#) affecting 262 million peopleⁱ.
- With more than 2.2 million new cases of **lung cancer** in 2020 and 1.80 million deaths, globally, lung cancer is responsible for 1 in 4 cancer deaths.
- **Lower respiratory tract infection or pneumonia** is a leading cause of mortality, accounting for more than 2.4 million deaths every year, particularly among those in LMICs. COVID-19 has dramatically increased deaths from pneumonia globally.
- In children under 5 years of age, **pneumonia** is the leading single cause of death outside the neonatal period.

- **TB** is a major burden with the World Health Organization’s annual global report finding that [TB deaths have risen for the first time in more than a decade](#) due to the COVID pandemic.ⁱⁱ

FIRS asks that governments, health care workers and researchers focus on three key issues to help reduce respiratory health inequalities:

- The global burden of the major respiratory diseases and the impact of COVID-19;
- The importance of early detection and screening;
- Reducing inequalities in screening, diagnosis, prevention and treatment of lung conditions.

FIRS President Professor Heather Zar said:

“The theme for this World Lung Day is Lung Health for All. That’s why we are calling on governments worldwide to work together to build equitable capacity, infrastructure, and resources.

“COVID has highlighted global inequities in access to effective strategies for respiratory health. We have very effective interventions to prevent and treat respiratory diseases, but these are unavailable or unaffordable in many parts of the world. Reducing inequality requires an integrated approach which incorporates social, environmental, economic and medical initiatives. We have effective interventions – but we must use these more equitably.”

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Further information

[The Global Impact of Respiratory Disease](#) report outlines major causes of respiratory disease, including lung cancer, and lays out recommendations for global action.

[FIRS Lung Health Fact Sheet](#) is a quick reference guide to the impact of the ‘Big Five’ respiratory diseases.

Join us for the first Forum of International Respiratory Societies/ World Health Organization joint World Lung Day webinar - *Respiratory disease in the era of COVID – a global perspective* on 22 September, 14:00 - 15:30 CEST. Register here <https://bit.ly/FIRSWHO>

About the Forum of International Respiratory Societies

[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. 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.

FIRS comprises the American College of Chest Physicians (CHEST), American Thoracic Society (ATS), the 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), the Global Initiative for Asthma (GINA), and the Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease (GOLD).

ⁱ <https://www.thelancet.com/pb-assets/Lancet/gbd/summaries/diseases/asthma.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240037021>

