Rheumatic heart disease (RHD) is a preventable, treatable form of cardiovascular disease affecting over 32 million people around the world and killing 275,000 of them each year.

Heart screening with echocardiography has made it possible to more accurately diagnose RHD before symptoms begin. The 2013 Global Burden of Disease study estimates that, of the 32 million people living with RHD, 55% have severe disease.

An estimated quarter of a million people die of RHD annually. However, these estimates do not include deaths from the complications of RHD: stroke, heart rhythm abnormalities, heart valve infections, and maternal death.

“Much uncertainty remains for trends in mortality caused by rheumatic heart disease, partly because endemic populations are concentrated within poorer subnational regions where data collection is limited and rheumatic heart disease might not always be coded as the underlying cause of death.”


In 2013, RHD accounted for 473,200 years of life lived with disability (YLD). This does not include people living with a history of rheumatic fever who also require ongoing secondary prophylaxis.

The economic impact of premature death from RHD in low- and middle-income countries in 2013 was estimated at $56 billion.

A community-based program on primary and secondary prevention in Cuba reduced the incidence of acute rheumatic fever by 87% and direct medical costs by 90%. The program was estimated to cost merely $0.07 (US 2010) per at-risk child per year.

References

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