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Diabetes kills 1 person every 6 seconds, with cases expected to rise 55%

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GENEVA — Diabetes kills one person every six seconds and afflicts 382 million people worldwide, according to the International Diabetes Federation, which has been canvassing the help of people ranging from celebrity chef Jamie Oliver to Bob Marley's nephew to raise awareness about the problem. advertisement

The number of diabetes cases has climbed 4.4 percent over the past two years, according to new figures the Brussels-based federation released Thursday. The number of people affected by the disease is expected to climb 55 percent to 592 million by 2035 as factors including poor diet, a more sedentary lifestyle, increases in obesity and life expectancy fuel an epidemic, it said. There were only 285 million sufferers worldwide in 2009.

"We haven't seen any kind of stabilizing, any kind of reversal," Leonor Guariguata, an epidemiologist and project coordinator for IDF's Diabetes Atlas, published every two years, said in a phone interview. "Diabetes continues to be a very big problem and is increasing even beyond previous projections."

The disease, caused by a lack of insulin the body needs to convert blood sugar into energy, is becoming a financial burden on governments, and led to \$548 billion in global health-care spending this year, the federation said. To counter the surge, it recommends policy makers across many sectors should devise concerted action.

Jamie Oliver and Charles Mattocks, Bob Marley's nephew, are among celebrities that have been helping IDF advocate the need for healthy living. TV celebrity Oliver, who has sold more than 30 million cookbooks and owns restaurants from London to Sydney, has appeared in IDF's magazine Diabetes Voice while Mattocks, also a chef, is currently touring the U.S. in a camper to speak about the benefits of a healthy lifestyle and eating habits.

"It's all about awareness, awareness and awareness," Mike Doustdar, Senior Vice President of Novo Nordisk, the world's biggest insulin maker, said during a webcast co-hosted with IDF before the announcement. "Diabetes is a silent disease, so the best thing we can do about it is to talk about it."

The call is not going unheard. Health officials from almost 200 countries in May adopted nine targets, such as reducing average daily salt consumption by 30 percent by 2025, in a bid to fight cancer, heart disease and diabetes, and called for curbs on marketing unhealthy food to children under a plan to cut the world's leading causes of death.

More help is needed. IDF estimates that 5.1 million people die annually because of the disease, with an average 10 million diabetes cases emerging every year. The majority of cases affects 40- to 59-year-olds, according to IDF. Every year, diabetes also leads to more than 1 million amputations, 500,000 kidney failures and 1.5 million cases of blindness, according to a slide provided by Novo Nordisk.

The spread of the disease has increased faster than the world's population, which exceeds 7 billion and has increased 2.2 percent in two years, according to U.S. Census Bureau estimates.

"More younger adults are developing diabetes," Guariguata said. "That's telling us that the pace of the epidemic is faster than the pace of change of demographics alone."

The new projections may not even be giving a full picture of the situation, according to the federation.

"These are probably substantial underestimates of what the real problem is," Paul Zimmet, honorary president of IDF and director emeritus of the Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute in Melbourne, said in an interview before the announcement. "You can only work on the information that's available to work on."

Four of every five people with diabetes are in developing countries where there aren't big studies to work with, he added.

In China, recent figures showed that the epidemic being much worse than previously estimated. The most comprehensive nationwide survey for diabetes ever conducted in the Asian country showed 12 percent of adults, or 114 million people, have the disease. The finding, published Sept. 4 in the Journal of the American Medical Association, added 22 million diabetics, equivalent to the population of Australia, to a 2007 estimate. That means almost one in three diabetes sufferers globally is in China.

The China study wasn't included in the Atlas figures presented Thursday for lack of time, IDF said.

The problem is bigger in poorer regions that have fewer resources at hand to fight the diseases, for example South Africa, and where more people die of disease before the age of 60, Guariguata said.

"These are preventable deaths, premature deaths that don't have to occur," she said.