

Deaths and major morbidity from asbestos-related diseases in Asia likely to surge in next 20 years

June 9 2011

An alarming new article in *Respirology* issues a serious warning of massive rises in deaths from asbestos-related lung diseases in Asia. Dr Ken Takahashi, Acting Director of the WHO Collaborating Center for Occupational Health, and his team put together important data on asbestos use in 47 Asian countries in this landmark article. Cyprus, Israel and Japan had the highest age-adjusted mortality rates in Asia. This study published in *Respirology*, a journal of the Asian Pacific Society of Respirology, will serve as an important reference document for health authorities in Asian-Pacific.

Asian countries accounted for 64% of the [global consumption](#) of asbestos in the period of 2001-2007, a striking increase from 14% between 1920 and 1970. This is a result of unregulated asbestos import and use in many Asian countries.

"Despite concerns of the global ARD epidemic and Asia's growing importance in the world, data on current asbestos use and asbestos related diseases in Asia remain limited," said Dr. Ken Takahashi. This article extracted data from the WHO Mortality Database and published literature and will inform public health planning and regional health policies in Asian countries.

The WHO identifies asbestos as one of the most dangerous occupational carcinogens, declaring the need to eliminate asbestos use and associated

health damages. An estimated 107,000 people worldwide die from asbestos related diseases. Asbestos is a mineral fiber commonly used for insulation in constructions. It is relatively affordable and makes it attractive in developing countries.

Asbestos related [lung diseases](#), particularly mesothelioma, lung cancer and asbestosis (asbestos induced [lung fibrosis](#)), typically develop after decades of lag time from first exposure. Up to 2007, Asian patients accounted for 13% of the cumulative global mortality from asbestos-related pleura-pulmonary diseases. Dr. Takahashi is concerned that "the sharp increase in asbestos use in Asia will see a surge of mortality and morbidity from asbestos related diseases in this region in the decades ahead."

This article will serve as a stern warning for Asian governments who have yet to ban the use of asbestos. Healthcare providers in Asia must also begin to equip themselves the expertise and resources to manage this 'Asian [asbestos](#) tsunami.'

Provided by Wiley

Citation: Deaths and major morbidity from asbestos-related diseases in Asia likely to surge in next 20 years (2011, June 9) retrieved 8 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-06-deaths-major-morbidity-asbestos-related-diseases.html>

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