

Food safety focus of new health campaign

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The United Nations launched a food safety campaign Tuesday for an era in which millions are dying of hunger or tainted produce even as more and more people fall ill from eating too much.

"Food safety, quality and quantity must go together," Margaret Chan, director general of the UN World Health Organization (WHO), said at Paris' Rungis wholesale market, where she launched World Health Day 2015 under the theme: "From farm to plate, make [food](#) safe."

Millions of people around the world wage a daily battle to obtain safe food, and the WHO says about two million die every year of food-borne and water-borne diseases.

Along the long production chain, food can be contaminated by viruses, bacteria, parasites or chemicals, sometimes from polluted water. Tainted food causes more than 200 diseases ranging in severity from diarrhoea to cancers.

According to initial figures from a WHO report set to be released later this year, some 582 million people suffered from 22 different food-borne diseases in 2010, and 351,000 people died.

More than 40 percent of people who fell ill were children under five, and poor countries, particularly in Africa, were hardest hit.

Unsafe food also posed major economic risks, said a WHO statement.

A 2011 E. coli outbreak in Germany reportedly caused \$1.3 billion (1.2 billion euros) in losses for farmers and industry, and \$236 million in emergency aid payments to 22 European Union member states.

"Countries must come up with the right policies and the right systems for prevention and control at source," Chan said.

Yet Bernard Vallat, director general of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), said more than 100 countries around the world still have no legislation to align domestic policies with international [food safety](#) standards.

Another major problem is hunger placing people at risk of killer pathogens, like the Ebola virus, carried by animals they eat or come in contact with in the pursuit of food.

"When there is no [food security](#), meaning people are not sure whether they are going to get food ... they go into the forest to hunt for bush meat," Chan said in reference to the west African Ebola outbreak.

The epidemic, which has claimed more than 10,000 lives since December 2013, has been blamed partly on people venturing ever deeper into the forest in search of resources.

On the other end of the nutrition scale, overeating is becoming an ever bigger challenge for health authorities.

"Eating the wrong type of nutrition, high energy, high fat, can give you heart disease, diabetes and of course obesity," Chan said.

"I am very concerned about the whole issue of obesity and its consequences."

The WHO's campaign hopes to make consumers aware of the health dangers that may lurk in their food, with tips on eating a balanced diet and preparing meals hygienically.

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