

Experts: World Facing Diabetes Catastrophe

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By Emelia Sithole

PARIS (Reuters) - **More than 300 million people worldwide are at risk of developing diabetes and the disease's economic impact in some hard-hit countries could be higher than that of the AIDS pandemic, diabetes experts warned on Monday.**

In a report released at the International Diabetes Federation conference in Paris, experts estimate the annual healthcare costs of diabetes worldwide for people aged 20 to 79 are at least **\$153 billion.**

"In some countries with a higher incidence, diabetes has a higher economic impact than AIDS," Williams Rhys, professor of clinical epidemiology at the University of Wales, told a news conference.

According to the Diabetes Atlas report, total direct healthcare spending on the disease worldwide will be between \$213 billion and \$396 billion by 2025, if predictions are correct that the number of people with diabetes will rise to 333 million by 2025 from 194 million.

Diabetes occurs in two basic forms: type I, which occurs in children and adolescents and accounts for five-10 percent of all diabetes cases, and the more common type II, or adult onset diabetes.

Patients with type I diabetes do not produce enough insulin while those with type II produce insulin but cannot use it effectively. Adult onset diabetes can often be prevented or controlled in its early stages with careful diet and exercise, but patients often need a range of drugs to control it.

Diabetes can lead to blindness, kidney failure, heart disease, disability and death.

HEALTHIER FOODS

More than 75 percent of diabetes cases are expected to be in developing countries by 2025 because of rapid culture and social changes as well as

increasing urbanization. This is expected to further burden healthcare systems already stretched by the AIDS pandemic.

"What AIDS was in the last 20 years of the 20th century, diabetes is going to be in the first 20 years of this century," said Paul Zimmet, foundation director of the International Diabetes Institute.

Zimmet and other experts say the diabetes epidemic will be fueled by an estimated 314 million people with impaired glucose tolerance (IGT) or higher than normal blood glucose levels -- a high risk condition for developing type II diabetes.

They also warn that type II diabetes was increasing in children and adolescents in many countries and is linked to rising obesity. They urged food companies -- especially those who make fast foods -- to produce healthier foods and governments to set up national campaigns to combat diabetes.

"We are running out of time," IDF President-elect Pierre Lefebvre warned during a news conference.

"If action is not taken now to stop the rise in diabetes, there is a significant risk that governments and social security systems may fail to ensure the appropriate care to the millions who will be affected by diabetes in 2025," he said.