

The State of the World's Health

- 1 Individuals regularly make decisions about their physical and mental health. They do this partly because a serious illness can have a devastating effect on a person and on his or her family. Similarly, just as the health of a family is connected to individuals within that family, the health of a nation is clearly connected to the health of its people. A country's economic strength depends on a healthy, productive workforce. Therefore, it is in the interest of governments to monitor the health of their populations and to examine the connections between such factors as health and lifestyle. Using statistics from governments, international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) then try to answer an important question: How healthy is the world?
- 2 The WHO uses two indicators – life expectancy and mortality rates – to assess the health of large **populations**. Life expectancy is the average age a person is expected to live. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, most countries have seen a significant increase in life expectancy. Today, the average global citizen can expect to live 27 years longer than his relatives in the 1900s. Some nations have experienced even more dramatic increases; the average Japanese person, for example, lives 38 years longer than his or her counterpart lived 100 years ago. As Figure 1.1 indicates, even the

WHILE YOU READ 1
As you read this paragraph, highlight the topic.

Figure 1.1 Life Expectancies 1970–2015

COUNTRY	LIFE EXPECTANCY 1970–1975	LIFE EXPECTANCY 2010–2015
The World	58.3	68.5
Australia	71.7	82.0
Bangladesh	45.3	66.2
Brazil	59.5	74.7
Canada	73.2	81.4
China	63.2	74.0
Egypt	51.1	72.6
India	50.7	66.7
Saudi Arabia	53.9	73.8
United Kingdom	72.0	80.1
United States	71.5	78.9

Source: Earthtrends.org



Children's health is an important indicator of a country's health.

last 40 years has seen considerable increases worldwide. Therefore, using this indicator of life expectancy, the world at the start of the twenty-first century is significantly healthier than at the start of the previous **century**.

3 The second indicator of world health is mortality rates, defined as the number of deaths within a specific geographic **region**. Mortality data is connected to life expectancy, with experts focusing on the number of premature deaths; in other words, the number of people who die before the average life expectancy within that area. In order to measure the health of a specific region, the WHO focuses on child mortality, since this accounts for more than 20 percent of all premature deaths. Unlike statistics for life expectancy, mortality rates provide a less optimistic

picture of world health. Globally, child mortality is down by 30 percent since 1990, which is particularly encouraging since rates have fallen in all world regions. However, beneath this promising trend lie serious disparities between nations and between individuals living within a nation. Mortality rates are falling much more rapidly in wealthier countries, and within a wealthy country, mortality rates are falling more rapidly for those with higher incomes. Therefore, although there are reasons to be hopeful about mortality rates worldwide, there are still areas of concern.

4 The goal of most governments is, of course, to reduce mortality rates, and to do this, experts target the many causes of premature death. While there has been significant progress in the way medicine treats and even eradicates infectious diseases, these diseases are still responsible for millions of deaths every year, particularly in developing countries. For example, HIV/AIDS, virtually unknown until 30 years ago, has killed approximately 30 million people worldwide. At first, many nations were slow to deal with HIV/AIDS because of the social stigma surrounding the disease. In fact, some governments did not want to accept that HIV/AIDS was a health problem in their countries. Today, however, most countries are working toward HIV/AIDS prevention. As a result of these efforts, new infections are declining – 16 percent globally between 2000 and 2008. The development of new drugs, and particularly combinations of drugs, has also led to a decline in the number of HIV/AIDS deaths associated with this disease.

WHILE YOU READ 2

Quickly reread paragraph 2. What claim does the writer make about the topic? Highlight the claim.

WHILE YOU READ 3

As you read this paragraph, highlight the sentence that contains the main idea.

5 One factor that clearly affects both life expectancy and mortality rates is **lifestyle**. For instance, just as eating too little is unhealthy, so is eating too much. Severe obesity can reduce life expectancy by as much as 20 years. It can also lead to diabetes, one of the fastest growing diseases today. Smoking is another lifestyle choice that has serious health consequences. Although the number of smokers is decreasing in developed nations, it is growing in developing ones. The Center for Disease Control (CDC), an organization based in the United States, estimates that there are a billion smokers worldwide and that 80 percent of them live in developing countries. Every year, six million people die from tobacco-related products, including those who contract diseases from second-hand smoke, that is, smoke inhaled by nonsmokers. Such lifestyle choices lead to poor health, both for individuals and countries.

6 Information about life expectancy, mortality rates, and lifestyle can begin to address the question: What is the state of the world's health today? The answer is a mixed one. Because life expectancy is increasing globally, most people can expect to live a longer life. However, infectious diseases and poor lifestyle choices still lead to millions of deaths, especially in developing countries. This clearly demonstrates the need for nations to continue to work on improving health worldwide. Providing jobs and increasing incomes is an important part of this effort since there is a direct correlation between income level and health. There is also a strong connection between education and health. People who are better educated are less likely to contract serious diseases and are more likely to recover when they get sick. Knowledge allows people to make healthy lifestyle choices, get better jobs, eat healthier food, and pass these advantages to their children. With increasing access to good education as well as the ability for people to support themselves, the world's health will no doubt improve.

WHILE YOU READ 4

As you read, highlight details that support the main idea of this paragraph.



Healthy lifestyle choices are important.