WORLD ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH DAY

26th SEPTEMBER 2020

THEME:
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH, A KEY PUBLIC HEALTH INTERVENTION IN DISEASE PANDEMIC PREVENTION.

Environmental health is a branch of public health concerned with all aspects of the natural and built environment. As of 2016 the WHO website on environmental health states "Environmental health addresses all physical, chemical and biological factors external to a person, and all related factors impacting behaviors. It encompasses the assessment and control of those environmental factors that potentially affect health. It is targeted towards preventing disease and creating health-supportive environments. As a fundamental component of a comprehensive public health system, Environmental health works to advance policies and programs to reduce diseases and other environmental exposures in air, water, soil and food to protect residents and provide communities with healthier environments."

According to the WHO (2020), 24% of global deaths are linked to the environment, which is roughly 13.7 million deaths per year.

Poor health often results from poor environments, and by helping to improve the conditions in which we live and work, Environmental Health Practitioners (EHPs) make a huge difference to the public's health and wellbeing. Poor environmental quality has its greatest impact on people whose health status is already at risk. Therefore, Environmental health must address the societal and environmental factors that increases the likelihood of exposure and disease. (*ref: https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/environmental-health*).

EHPs can be found in every community, working hard every day to keep us healthy and safe and to reduce health inequalities. EHPs work across a wide range of sectors and specialisms. With diverse backgrounds and experience, they are all passionate about protecting the public's health (*ref: https://www.cieh.org*).

Key to the implementation of disease preventive measures is the Environmental Health Practitioner (EHP). EHPs are playing a vital role since the initial response to the outbreak of

diseases pandemics all over the world in implementing of controls at border posts and airports, e.g. traveller screening, implementation of quarantining rules, fit testing for respirators, isolation of cases and monitoring of isolation facilities, contact tracing and port health management and screening and public education and training. However, with a broad range of core functions and an array of specialisms focused on preventive health, it can be argued that the EHP has a much wider role to play in the control of both current and future pandemics. (*ref: Tracy Morse & others--- Environmental Health Practitioners – a key profession in the control of COVID-19 in Sub-Saharan Africa.*)

EHPs play a role in disaster preparedness and response, investigate outbreaks of infectious diseases and prevent it from spreading any further, inspections of supermarkets, tuck shops, convenience stores, soup kitchens, old age homes, funeral undertakers' premises, hospitals, health care risk waste generating premises, clinics, etc., requiring EHPs to visit these premises and ensure compliance monitoring in terms of pandemic disease regulations and protocols. EHPs are mandated to attend to the human remains of pandemic disease deaths. E.g. Ebola, COVID-19 & etc. and to be present at hospitals, funeral undertakers' premises and cemeteries and crematoria.

Some examples of the most recent infectious diseases outbreaks, according to WHO, all over the world are as follows:

- 2013/2014 -Ebola – 9936 cases, 4,877 deaths – Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Nigeria, United States, Senegal, Spain.
- 2010/2013—Cholera – 8,954 deaths, 726,228 cases—Haiti, Dominican Republic, Cuba, Mexico.
- 2009 – HINI flu pandemic – 250,00 deaths, 59,000,000 cases.
- 2012 – MERS—858 deaths out of 2494 cases
- 2003 - SARS – 18,096 cases and 774 deaths
- 1996/1997 – Meningitis—25,000 deaths and 250,000 cases – Sub-Saharan Africa.

The coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, now called COVID-19, which is an infectious disease has affected 216 countries all over the world. On the 30th January 2020 the WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a Global Public Health Emergency. On the 11th March 2020, the WHO declared -COVID-19 disease a global pandemic. The outbreak of this COVID-19 disease, has really caused serious devastation, loss of life and economic hardship in the lives of our people all over the world.

Since then this disease has affected many families and caused many deaths all over the world. Here are some of the current statistics according to WHO, concerning COVID-19 disease from around the world as of 17th July 2020:

- 13,718,081 cases
- 587,330 deaths
- 8,172,464 recovered
- 4,958,287 active cases
- 8,759,794 closed cases

WHO has declared COVID-19 disease as public enemy number one? This disease has really changed our habits and the way we live. It has also tested the health systems in many countries and has impacted on the livelihoods of many people and destroyed many world economies.

Therefore, it is important that our highly skilled EHPs must face up to the challenges that this COVID-19 disease pandemic is posing and do everything possible to protect our communities.

We encourage all member organizations and regional groups, academic associates and national governments to set up initiatives and events to celebrate World Environmental Health Day.

Regarding information about planned initiatives as well as short videos, we will provide opportunity for this to be displayed on the specific page on the IFEH website: www.ifeh.org/WEHD. This opportunity is open to all regardless of membership of the IFEH.

Please send information about your initiatives to the IFEH webmaster, Henning Hansen, email address: henning.hansen@ifeh.org

We look forward to hear about your 2020 initiatives in order to pursue the intentions behind our World Environmental Health Day.

Dr. Selva Mudaly

President - IFEH