Geneva, 12 May 2014 – Worldwide, 3.3 million deaths in 2012 were due to harmful use of alcohol, says a new report launched by the World Health Organization (WHO) today. Alcohol consumption can not only lead to dependence but also increases people's risk of developing more than 200 diseases including liver cirrhosis and some cancers. In addition, harmful drinking can lead to violence and injuries.

The report also finds that harmful use of alcohol makes people more susceptible to infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and pneumonia.

The *Global status report on alcohol and health 2014* provides country profiles for alcohol consumption in the 194 WHO Member States, the impact on public health and policy responses.

"More needs to be done to protect populations from the negative health consequences of alcohol consumption," says Dr Oleg Chestnov, WHO Assistant Director-General for Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health. "The report clearly shows that there is no room for complacency when it comes to reducing the harmful use of alcohol."

Some countries are already strengthening measures to protect people. These include increasing taxes on alcohol, limiting the availability of alcohol by raising the age limit, and regulating the marketing of alcoholic beverages.

The report also highlights the need for action by countries including:

- national leadership to develop policies to reduce harmful use of alcohol (66 WHO Member States had written national alcohol policies in 2012);
- national awareness-raising activities (nearly 140 countries reported at least one such activity in the past three years);
- health services to deliver prevention and treatment services, in particular increasing prevention, treatment and care for patients and their families, and supporting initiatives for screening and brief interventions.

In addition the report shows the need for communities to be engaged in reducing harmful use of alcohol.

On average every person in the world aged 15 years or older drinks 6.2 litres of pure alcohol per year. But as less than half the population (38.3%) actually drinks alcohol, this means that those who do drink consume on average 17 litres of pure alcohol annually.

The report also points to the fact that a higher percentage of deaths among men than among women are from alcohol-related causes - 7.6% of men's deaths and 4% of women's deaths – though there is evidence that women may be more vulnerable to some alcohol-related health conditions compared to men. In addition, the authors note that there is concern over the steady increase in alcohol use among women.

"We found that worldwide about 16% of drinkers engage in heavy episodic drinking - often referred to as 'binge-drinking' - which is the most harmful to health," explains Dr Shekhar Saxena, Director for Mental Health and Substance Abuse at WHO. "Lower-income groups are more affected by the social and health consequences of alcohol. They often lack quality health care and are less protected by functional family or community networks."

Globally, Europe is the region with the highest consumption of alcohol per capita, with some of its countries having particularly high consumption rates. Trend analysis shows that the consumption level is stable over the last 5 years in the region, as well as in Africa and the Americas, though increases have been reported in the South-East Asia and the Western Pacific regions.

Through a global network, WHO is supporting countries in their development and implementation of policies to reduce the harmful use of alcohol. The need for intensified action was endorsed in the landmark 2011 United Nations General Assembly meeting, which identified alcohol as one of four common risk factors* contributing to the non-communicable diseases (NCDs) epidemic.