



PRESS RELEASE

Embargoed: 25 August 2024

[STARTS]

WORLD-LEADING EXPERTS CONVENE IN SRI LANKA TO COMBAT RESPIRATORY DISEASE BURDEN IN ASIA.

Respiratory conditions are responsible for one in five deaths globally. Asia is a region severely affected by a high disease morbidity and mortality due to respiratory illnesses. This week, respiratory health experts from across the world will convene in Colombo to further cross-country collaboration and showcase the breadth of research being conducted to decrease the burden of respiratory disease in the Asian region.

The NIHR Global Health Research Unit on Respiratory Health (RESPIRE)'s Annual Scientific Meeting runs from 27 to 29 August 2024, and is the research unit's first time convening a conference in the country since its inception in 2016, highlighting the need for further investment into respiratory health research in Sri Lanka.

The three-day meeting includes an inauguration ceremony and external showcase on 27 August 2024, where honoured guests from the Ministry of Health, the medical and allied health faculties of three Sri Lankan universities, the Sri Lanka Medical Association and the Sri Lanka College of Pulmonologists will reflect on priorities to ensure better respiratory health in the region. Research teams will present the latest from their studies and discuss ways forward to improve global respiratory health.

Respiratory diseases have a major impact on the Sri Lankan Health System

Together, chronic respiratory diseases (CRD) and pneumonia caused the highest number (18%) of Sri Lankan hospital deaths in 2017. Comparisons of proportionate mortality data during the past decade revealed a rising trend of deaths in hospital due to these two conditions. Among chronic respiratory diseases, asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) are the two leading diseases causing the highest burden of disease and deaths. Childhood wheezing is a major cause of school absence, and in adults, asthma and COPD have a high prevalence of 11% and 10.5% respectively.

Poor air quality is claimed to be responsible for the rise of many respiratory diseases, including lung cancers. Urbanization and the exponential increase in motor vehicles have been linked to poor ambient air quality throughout the country. Just as outdoor air pollution is a concern in cities, indoor air pollution threatens rural communities, where firewood is used for cooking in poorly ventilated kitchens. Late-onset wheezing has been observed to be more prevalent among non-smoking women from rural communities exposed to kitchen smoke.

Sri Lankan researchers from Universities of Sri Jayewardenepura, Peradeniya and Wayamba have selected indoor air quality as their research focus under the RESPIRE collaboration, due to it being largely understudied despite its wide scope. The extent of indoor air pollution due to biomass fuel consumption and its health effects on pregnant mothers and children will be studied in two main districts – Colombo and Kandy. They will also study the existing legislation on air pollution and tobacco smoking to identify gaps and rooms for improvement. The researchers believe the work will generate important findings that could be used to uplift respiratory health in Sri Lanka.

In 2019, CRD were the third-leading cause of death globally, responsible for four million deaths with a prevalence of 454.6 million cases. Despite the coronavirus pandemic positioning respiratory health as a key public health concern, there is an ongoing need for local and regional research to provide the evidence needed to implement

NIHR Global Health Research Unit on Respiratory Health (RESPIRE)

www.ed.ac.uk/usher/respire

RESPIRE@ed.ac.uk



best practice and care. With the support of collaborations like RESPIRE, governments and policy makers can draw on findings to inform policy to improve respiratory health for its people.

[ENDS]

Notes to Editors

For media enquiries, please contact:

Professor Savithri Wimalasekera, University of Sri Jayawardenapura. savithriww@yahoo.com

Professor Duminda Yasaratne, University of Peradeniya. vasaratne@yahoo.com

About the NIHR Global Health Research Unit on Respiratory Health (RESPIRE)

RESPIRE aims to reduce the number of deaths and wider health and societal impacts from respiratory diseases in South Asia.

Co-led by the University of Edinburgh and Universiti Malaya, RESPIRE partners based in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka collaborate to deliver low-cost, scalable policy and clinical interventions to reduce respiratory disease and death in Asia. RESPIRE's research programmes cover infectious diseases - for example tuberculosis and pneumonia, non-communicable diseases - including asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, preventable risk factors - such as air quality and tobacco usage, and the impact of climate change on respiratory health.

RESPIRE is funded by NIHR 16/136/109 and NIHR132826 using UK international development funding from the UK Government to support global health research. The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the NIHR or the UK government.

Learn more at www.ed.ac.uk/usher/respire/ or @RESPIREGlobal on [Twitter/X](#) and [Facebook](#)

The National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR)

The mission of the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) is to improve the health and wealth of the nation through research. We do this by:

- Funding high quality, timely research that benefits the National Health Service, public health and social care;
- Investing in world-class expertise, facilities and a skilled delivery workforce to translate discoveries into improved treatments and services;
- Partnering with patients, service users, carers and communities, improving the relevance, quality and impact of our research;
- Attracting, training and supporting the best researchers to tackle complex health and social care challenges;
- Collaborating with other public funders, charities and industry to help shape a cohesive and globally competitive research system;
- Funding applied global health research and training to meet the needs of the poorest people in low and middle income countries (LMICs).

NIHR is funded by the Department of Health and Social Care. The NIHR Global Health Research portfolio supports high-quality applied health research for the direct and primary benefit of people in LMICs, using international development funding from the UK Government.