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WHAT MINISTRIES OF EDUCATION NEED TO KNOW ABOUT NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASES

About non-communicable diseases (NCDs)

In Thailand, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as heart attack, stroke, diseases, cancer, diabetes and chronic lung disease¹ caused an estimated 400,000 deaths in 2016, representing 74 percent of total deaths. Approximately, half of these deaths were premature, and largely preventable.

Why should Ministry of Education be concerned about NCDs

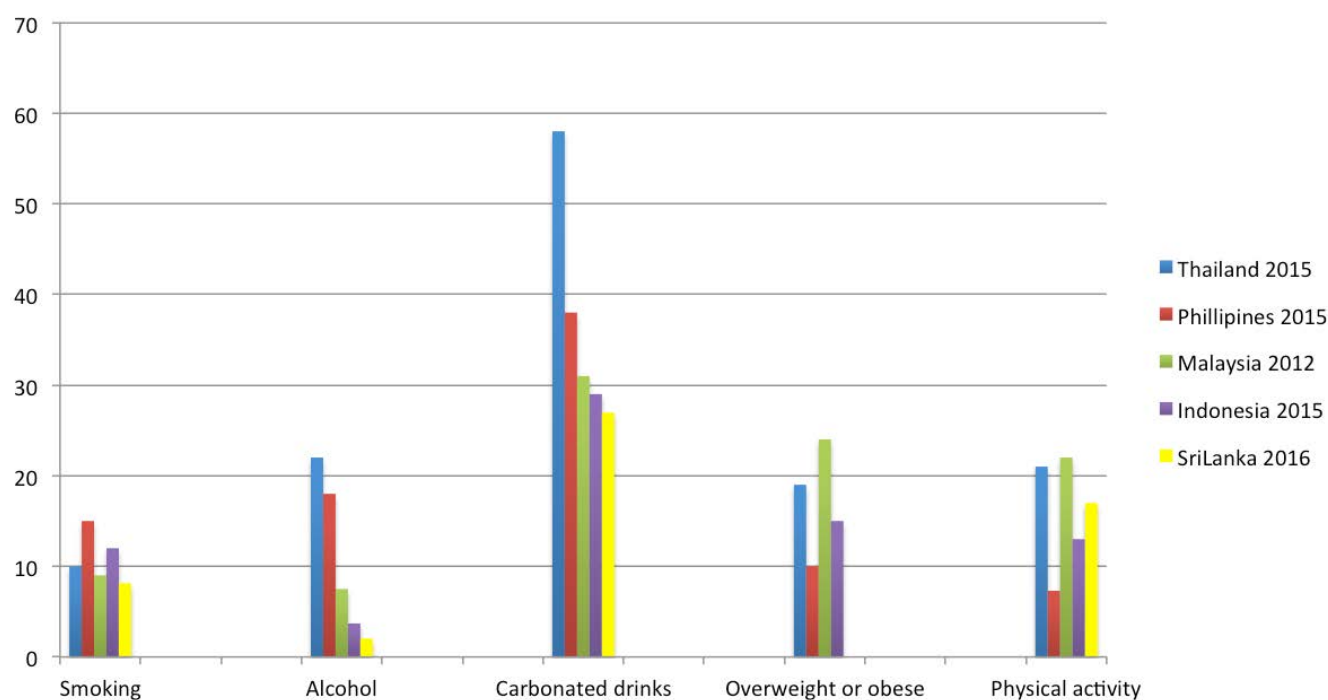
NCDs and their risk factors undermine school education and lifelong learning by:

- **Interfering with school attendance and academic performance** of students who suffer from adverse effects of NCD risk factors such as alcohol or when they have to care for family members who become ill from an NCD.
- **Diverting family resources away from education** of children by driving parents into sickness, poverty, and care-taking roles.
- **Draining educational resources** by taking away lives prematurely, health and productivity of teachers.

Risk factors for NCDs among students in Thailand²

- One out of 10 students smoke cigarettes (15 percent boys and 5 percent girls). Smoking rates continue to be high among boys and increasing steadily among girls.
- One out of five students are overweight. Prevalence of overweight increased dramatically between 2008 and 2015, rising from 5 to 24 percent among boys, and from 4 to 13 percent among girls.
- Over half of students drink carbonated drinks daily, and regularly eat food from fast food restaurants.
- In 2015, about one-fifth of students reported drinking alcohol. Prevalence of alcohol use among girls doubled, from 9 percent in 2008 to 17 percent in 2015, while prevalence among boys remained high at 21 percent.

Figure 1: Comparison of prevalence (%) of risk factors for NCDs among students (13-15), in Thailand and neighbouring countries.



Data source: GSHS

Seven actions that the education sector can implement:

1. Announce and strictly enforce a policy to ensure that all schools/educational institutions are 100 percent smoke- and alcohol-free.
2. Announce and enforce a policy to ban unhealthy food in schools, especially sugar-sweetened beverages, and increase access to healthy food at affordable cost.
3. Prohibit scholarships or sponsorship by tobacco companies.
4. Incorporate quality physical activity into the daily curriculum for children at all ages aiming for at least 60 minutes of daily physical activity.
5. Include in the core curriculum information on the risks associated with tobacco, alcohol, unhealthy diet and physical inactivity.
6. Provide training to sensitize educators on NCDs and risk factors.
7. Offer counseling for quitting tobacco and alcohol for students and teachers.

Endnotes

- 1 Ministry of Public Health Thailand (2016). Tackling NCDs in Thailand. Presentation by Dr. Suppatra Srivanikcharon
- 2 WHO and Ministry of Public Health. Thailand global school-based student health survey in 2008 and 2015: key findings and country comparisons.

*This is a brief summary of the Sectoral Brief, What Ministries of Education Need to Know about Noncommunicable Diseases.