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Global life expectancy rises from 47 to 68 years

NEW YORK: Global life expectancy has increased sharply from 47 years in 1950-55 to 68 years in 2005-2010, the UN said in a report.

The report by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said people are living longer mainly because of improvements in nutrition and hygiene, and advances in vaccines and medical treatments against infectious and parasitic diseases that are "communicable."

With the decline in mortality more pronounced at younger ages, deaths have become increasingly concentrated at older ages when people are more likely to develop "non-communicable" chronic and degenerative diseases such as cancer, diabetes, heart and respiratory

problems, the report said.

Globally, it said, the proportion of deaths at age 60 or over has risen from 26% in 1950-55 to 54% in 2005-2010.

According to the report, the shift from communicable to non-communicable diseases as the main cause of deaths has occurred in all regions of the world except sub-Saharan Africa, where the HIV/AIDS epidemic is widespread and infectious and parasitic diseases still claim many lives.

If mortality continues to decline worldwide, the report said, the burden from non-communicable diseases will become even greater.

Because most of these diseases

are chronic and require long-term treatment and management, it recommends that efforts be concentrated in delaying the onset of illness.

The report said governments can do this by taking measures to reduce the risk factors associated with chronic diseases such as overweight, physical inactivity, tobacco use and alcohol abuse.

It also calls for governments to address the global shortage of health workers, especially in developing countries.

The report will be discussed at a meeting of the UN Commission on Population and Development from April 12-16 at UN headquarters. — AP