



Statement on World Heart Day by Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, Stella Kyriakides

Brussels, 28 September 2020

Tomorrow, 29 September, is World Heart Day. Ahead of this occasion, the Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, Stella **Kyriakides**, made the following statement:

"In these unprecedented times of COVID-19, taking care of your heart has become more important than ever before. More lives are already lost to cardiovascular diseases in the EU and in the world than any other disease. Among the 4.5 million deaths reported in the EU in 2016, over 540,000 were due to coronary diseases, including heart attacks.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made the lives even more difficult for the almost 49 million people currently living with such disease in the EU. Not only are they all facing an increased risk of falling seriously ill in case of infection, we have also seen many heart patients cancelling their regular appointments and scheduled surgeries during the pandemic – sometimes because they are too afraid to seek care. The restrictive measures imposed in many Member States have also resulted in many people neglecting physical activity and, even worse, stressful times has led to unhealthy habits like poor diets and increased alcohol consumption.

The message is clear. We must take better care of our hearts.

We work closely together with Member States to offer an integrated response, as many of the risk factors of cardiovascular disease are also risk factors of other non-communicable diseases. In our response, we focus on prevention across sectors and policy areas, tackling jointly common risk factors and scaling up actions on non-communicable diseases through the work of the Steering Group on Health Promotion, Disease Prevention and Management of Non-Communicable Diseases.

We are supporting Member States in reaching the nine voluntary targets on non-communicable diseases of the United Nations and the World Health Organization by 2025 and the Sustainable Development Goal 3.4, aiming to decrease premature deaths from non-communicable diseases by one third, and to promote mental health and well-being by 2030.

But we should not forget that we can do a lot ourselves: we can avoid up to 80% of non-communicable diseases altogether if we adopt a healthy lifestyle. This means eating a healthy, well balanced diet, exercising, drinking less alcohol and not smoking. This is what World Heart Day is about, the small changes that can make big differences. Let us take care of ourselves, those around us and our society by looking after our heart."

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