

The unhealthiest places in the world

According to a study by Clinic Compare, the unhealthiest country in the world is the Czech Republic. The study, which compared data on alcohol, tobacco consumption and obesity in 179 countries, found that Czech Republic residents are among the world's heaviest drinkers. Indeed, nine of the ten unhealthiest countries are located in Eastern Europe, where smoking is more common than in the rest of the world and is increasing among teenagers. The only one outside this region was the USA, where 36 per cent of the population are obese. Obesity levels are lower in the Czech Republic but are the highest in Europe.

The study must be taken with a pinch of salt, however. According to the rankings, the healthiest country in the world is Afghanistan due to its low obesity and alcohol consumption. In second and third place are Guinea and Niger. But that doesn't make them healthy places to live. Indeed, four countries listed among Clinic Compare's top ten healthiest countries, Guinea, DR Congo, Malawi and Mozambique, were among the least healthy nations in another study, the Global Competitiveness Index.

High consumption of alcohol, tobacco and food are diseases of affluence; that is, they are common in wealthy countries. However, many countries, especially in Africa, are still struggling with diseases of poverty. For example, the average life expectancy in DR Congo is just 53 years old. Here, many people die from diseases which could be treated in other countries. In Malawi, tuberculosis and HIV are common. These countries lack basic medical facilities and trained doctors. In Mozambique, where 30% of people cannot access health services, lack of nutrients in the diet is a far more common medical problem than overeating.

Moreover, Nepal, listed by Clinic Compare as the fourth healthiest country, is the tenth most polluted country and Afghanistan the fourteenth. Air pollution is a killer, with 7 million people dying worldwide each year from diseases associated with it. It is not just vehicle fumes and industries which are the problem. Around 2.4 billion people worldwide are exposed to dangerous levels of household air pollution while cooking on fires or stoves fuelled by kerosene, wood, dung and coal.

According to a different study, which measured factors such as the cost of staying healthy, life expectancy, air pollution, obesity, sunlight hours and crime rate, the healthiest country is Spain. This is most likely due to its traditionally healthy diet, clean air, the number of people walking to work

(37%), and free healthcare. Interestingly, another study, the Global Health Security Index, ranks the USA as the healthiest nation. This was because its high standards in research, safety and communication allow it to detect and respond to pandemics the most effectively. This contrasts with the Clinic Compare survey, which ranked it the tenth unhealthiest country, primarily because of its high obesity rate.

The countries with the highest levels of obesity, however, are in the Pacific islands. In countries such as Nauru, Tuvalu and Palau, over half the population is obese. This is a relatively new trend, as, before the 1950s, locals consumed a traditional diet that included bananas, coconuts, yams and seafood. Since then, incomes have increased, making imported convenience foods more affordable. This new scenario causes people to make poor food choices despite the availability of healthier, locally-grown options. In many regions of the USA, healthy choices just aren't available, or they are too expensive. In addition, this country's driving culture means that many people don't get enough exercise.

1 Residents of the Czech Republic...

- a. consume more alcohol than any other country in the world.
- b. have the highest combined rates of smoking, obesity and drinking alcohol.
- c. smoke more than any other country in Eastern Europe.
- d. are more obese than people in both the USA and the rest of Europe.

2 The writer of this article thinks that the Clinic Compare study...

- a. accurately identified the healthiest and least healthy nations.
- b. did not include enough countries in its study.
- c. failed to identify the healthiest countries accurately.
- d. is inaccurate because health issues have changed since the study

3 According to the article,

- a. there is more malnutrition than obesity in Mozambique.
- b. there are more diseases of affluence in DR Congo than in the USA.
- c. life expectancy in DR Congo is the lowest in the world.
- d. access to medical facilities and doctors in Malawi is gradually rising.

4 The text indicates that...

- a. Nepal has more pollution from vehicles and industries than Afghanistan.
- b. Fewer people die as a result of air pollution in Afghanistan than in Nepal.
- c. 2.4 billion people are currently suffering from diseases associated with air pollution.
- d. People put their health at risk when cooking on kerosene, wood, dung and coal.

5 According to the text, the USA is higher than Spain with regards to...

- a. the number of people who walk to work.
- b. the amount of air pollution
- c. the affordability of its health care.
- d. its ability to respond to disease outbreaks.

6 According to the text, what is the reason for high obesity rates in the Pacific Islands?

- a. The traditional diet is high in fat.
- b. People prefer to buy imported food.
- c. Fresh food is no longer grown locally.
- d. People do not get enough exercise.