

Beware: This Curable Disease Landed on WHO's 'Deadly Epidemic' List

Health authorities worldwide need to move much faster to prevent, detect and treat a “deadly epidemic” of tuberculosis if they are to reduce TB infections and deaths by 2030, the World Health Organization warned on Thursday.

In its annual report on tackling TB, a highly contagious lung disease which kills more people each year than HIV and malaria combined, the WHO said progress had been dismal and called for “bold political commitment and increased funding”.

Without it, the world would continue to chase the epidemic rather than get on top of it, it said.

“The dismal progress in the TB response is a tragedy for the millions of people suffering from this disease,” the director of the WHO's TB program, Mario Raviglione, said in a statement.

“To save more lives now, we must get newly recommended rapid tests, drugs and regimens to those who need them. Current actions and investments fall far short of what is needed.”

There were an estimated 10.4 million new TB cases worldwide in 2015, the report found, with six countries accounting for 60 percent of those—first India, then Indonesia, China, Nigeria, Pakistan and South Africa.

Some 1.8 million people died from TB last year, of whom 0.4 million were co-infected with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) that causes AIDS.

The report noted that while global TB deaths have fallen by 22 percent between 2000 and 2015, the disease was still one of

the top 10 causes of death globally in 2015.

Greg Elder of the international medical charity Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) said the figures constituted “a shockingly bad report card”.

“Countries are failing to diagnose and treat millions of people with TB,” he said in a statement. “Governments need to get their heads out of the sand and realize that TB is not a disease consigned to the 1800s; we see and treat TB in our clinics every day, and it’s a deadly threat to all of us.”

The WHO’s Director General Margaret Chan said: “There must be a massive scale-up of efforts, or countries will continue to run behind this deadly epidemic.”

The report warned of a widening gap between the finances needed for TB care and prevention in poor and middle-income countries, and actual funds available. A \$2-billion shortfall now, from some \$8.3 billion needed for 2016, will widen to £6 billion by 2020 if funding is not increased.

About 84 percent of the TB funding available in low and middle-income countries in 2016 was domestic, but this was mostly accounted for by the large and relatively wealthy BRICS countries—Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

Other less wealthy countries rely heavily on international donor financing, with more than 75 percent coming from The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria. {eoa}

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