

Experts from Taylor’s University Explain How We Can End the Threat of Tuberculosis

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Tuberculosis remains a significant global health challenge, with an estimated 10.6 million people falling ill and 1.3 million people dying from the disease in 2022 alone—making it the second largest infectious disease killer after COVID-19.

In 2023, tuberculosis cases in Malaysia were recorded at 26,781 cases, a five percent increase from the previous year.

PREVENTABLE & CURABLE, YET IT REMAINS A DEADLY THREAT

Despite being preventable and curable, tuberculosis has remained a leading cause of death from infectious diseases for decades. The 2022 numbers were the highest since the World Health Organization (WHO) began global monitoring in 1995, and above the pre-COVID baseline.

However, after two years of the COVID-19 pandemic-related disruptions, there has also been a major global recovery in the number of people diagnosed with tuberculosis and treated in 2022. These figures likely suggest a sizeable backlog of people who developed tuberculosis in previous years, but whose diagnosis and treatment were delayed due to COVID-19 that affected access to and provision of health services.

HOW TUBERCULOSIS SPREADS	COMMON SYMPTOMS OF TUBERCULOSIS
<p>The bacteria causing tuberculosis spread through tiny droplets released from the nose and mouth into the air during sneezing, coughing, or talking.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persistent coughing • Fever • Chills • Night sweats • Weight loss • Lack of appetite • Fatigue • Coughing blood

The disease thrives in crowded environments and typically affects the lungs (pulmonary tuberculosis), but it can also affect other sites (extrapulmonary tuberculosis).

MALAYSIA’S COMMITMENT TO ENDING THE DISEASE

In Malaysia, the National TB Control Programme and the National Strategic Plan align with the WHO targets to combat tuberculosis, reflecting the country’s commitment to ending the disease, supported by three key pillars.

- **The first pillar** emphasizes integrated, patient-centered care and prevention, including early case detection, and successful implementation of the BCG vaccination programme. Screening of high-risk populations, such as prison inmates and substance abuse victims, is an important strategy in early detection and enabling of timely intervention.
- **The second pillar** promotes government stewardship and accountability, ensuring quality-assured anti-tuberculosis drug supply, and reducing treatment costs to alleviate patient burden.
- **The third pillar** focuses on research and innovation to improve detection, treatment, and control, focusing on developing new drugs and vaccines.

INDIVIDUAL AWARENESS OF PREVENTIVE METHODS IS VITAL

These methods include practicing hand hygiene, proper cough etiquette, and wearing masks in crowded places.

Quitting smoking, maintaining a balanced diet to strengthen the immune system, and avoiding close contact with active tuberculosis cases can greatly reduce risks.

Anyone who shows symptoms of tuberculosis must consult a doctor immediately.

IN CLOSING

Challenges in addressing tuberculosis, including disrupted access to diagnosis and treatment, call for continuous strengthening of current policies and health systems. Aligning national tuberculosis response with regional and global strategies is imperative for effective management.

In Malaysia, tuberculosis initiatives not only contribute to ending the disease, but also to bolster primary health care, achieving universal health coverage and advancing the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

New Referral Program

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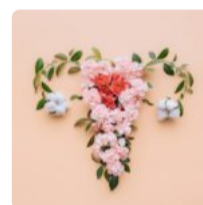


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