

JOINT PRESS RELEASE

TB elimination at stake unless Europe takes urgent care of the most vulnerable including the poor, the marginalised and migrants

Stockholm/Copenhagen 17/3/2016

New data released by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and WHO/Europe ahead of World TB Day show that an estimated 340 000 Europeans developed tuberculosis (TB) in 2014, corresponding to a rate of 37 cases per 100 000 population.

With new TB cases decreasing by 4.3% on average between 2010 and 2014, the WHO European Region has met the Millennium Development Goal target of reversing the incidence of TB by 2015. However, high rates of multidrug-resistant (MDR) TB and TB affecting vulnerable populations, such as the homeless, drug and alcohol abusers and migrants from countries with high numbers of cases TB continue to challenge TB elimination.

“Social circumstances or lifestyles may make it more difficult for some people to recognise the symptoms of TB, access healthcare services, follow a treatment or attend regular healthcare appointments. We need to think about tailored interventions for such vulnerable people, which can include outreach teams or directly observed treatment”, says **ECDC Acting Director Dr Andrea Ammon**. “In the EU/EEA, the number of new TB cases decreases only slowly by around 5% each year. And if TB is not successfully tackled in vulnerable groups, it will not be eliminated as planned. This is why ECDC releases scientific advice today to support countries in reaching poor and marginalised populations that are particularly vulnerable to TB”.

“One quarter of all 480 000 patients sick with MDR TB globally were in the European Region in 2014. This alarmingly high number is a major challenge for TB control”, says **Dr Zsuzsanna Jakab, WHO Regional Director for Europe**. “The most vulnerable groups, including poor and marginalised populations and migrants and refugees, are at greater risk of developing MDR TB. Because of their living conditions, TB is often diagnosed late, and it is harder for them to complete a treatment course. If we really want to eliminate TB from Europe, no one must be left behind. This is in line with the framework of Health 2020 and the global agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals”.

No systematic association between migration and transmission of tuberculosis

The risk of being infected or developing TB disease depends on several factors including TB rates in the country of origin. New TB cases in some origin countries are lower than the European Region’s average. In Syria, for example, new TB cases are 17 per 100 000 population, which is less than half than the European Region’s average (37) and not much higher than the EU/EEA average (12). In addition, as TB is not easily transmissible and contacts are limited, there is a low risk that migrants transmit the disease to the resident population.

Universal health coverage should be ensured for refugees and migrants, both documented and undocumented. The European Region is the only one in the world with a consensus document on the minimum package of cross-border TB control and care interventions. This includes ensuring access to medical services irrespective of a migrant's registration status and a non-deportation policy until intensive TB treatment has been concluded.

WHO recommends that TB screening is targeted to those most at risk. Among refugees and migrants it is

1/2

people coming from countries with a high number of new TB cases or who have been living or travelling in precarious situations and have possibly been exposed to TB infection. The recently published *Systematic screening for active tuberculosis: an operational guide* provides guidance on how to target and tailor TB screening, as this allows to detect active disease and to provide immediate treatment, thus breaking possible transmission among the refugees and their close contacts. TB screening must never be used as a reason to reject a refugee or a migrant.

-----ENDS-----

NOTES TO EDITORS

World Tuberculosis Day is celebrated on 24 March each year around the world. The overall goal of the Day is to raise awareness about the burden of tuberculosis (TB) worldwide and the status of TB prevention and control efforts.

TB elimination is defined as less than one case of TB disease per 1 million population per year.

The **low-incidence countries in the EU/EEA** reporting under 20 TB cases per 100 000 population are: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

The 18 high-priority countries in the WHO European Region are: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

The WHO European Region comprises 53 countries with a population of nearly 900 million people, of which around 508 million live in the EU/EEA (28 EU Member States plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway).

LINKS

[ECDC-WHO report Tuberculosis surveillance and monitoring in Europe 2016](#)

Links to ECDC resources

- [World TB Day 2016](#)
- [ECDC Guidance on tuberculosis control in vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations](#)
- [ECDC tuberculosis infographic](#)
- [Policy briefing: Interventions in vulnerable groups are the key to eliminating tuberculosis in Europe](#)

WHO resources

- [World TB Day](#)
- [Systematic screening for active tuberculosis: an operational guide](#)
- [Global tuberculosis report 2015](#)

CONTACT

ECDC press office

Tel.: +46 (0) 8 58 60 16 78

Email: press@ecdc.europa.eu

WHO Regional Office for Europe, Cristiana Salvi

Tel.: +45 45 33 68 37

E-mail: csa@euro.who.int

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) is an EU agency tasked with identifying, assessing and communicating threats to human health posed by infectious diseases. It supports the work of public health authorities in the EU and EEA Member States.