

JOINT PRESS RELEASE

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Tuberculosis cases down by 5% each year But Europe fails to cure majority of multidrug-resistant patients

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Across the 53 countries of the WHO European Region, an estimated 353 000 patients fell sick with tuberculosis (TB) in 2012, [according to new data](#) published by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control and the WHO Regional Office for Europe. The data show an average annual 5% decline in TB incidence across the Region over the last decade. Since 2011, the countries of the European Union and European Economic Area (EU/EEA) observed a 6% decrease in TB cases with 68 000 reported cases in 2012. Overall, the EU/EEA countries met their target of an average five-year decline. However, Europe has not yet met the set targets for successful treatment of multidrug-resistant TB.

Much has been done to control TB in countries of the European Region since the launch of the *Framework Action Plan to Fight Tuberculosis in the European Union* in 2008 and the adoption of the *Consolidated Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Multidrug- and Extensively Drug-resistant Tuberculosis in the WHO European Region 2011–2015* in 2011. Access to MDR TB treatment has been scaled up three-fold compared to 2011, but challenges still persist: every single day nearly 1 000 people are estimated to fall sick with TB across Europe. Particularly, multidrug-resistant (MDR) and extensively drug-resistant (XDR) TB pose a serious risk to the goal of eliminating TB across Europe by 2050.

Of the 27 countries worldwide with a high burden of MDR TB, 15 belong to the WHO European Region accounting for an estimated 76 400 MDR TB patients. Not even half of these are diagnosed due to limited laboratory capacity in the countries and only 50% of the MDR TB patients in the Region are reported as successfully treated. In the EU/EEA, the treatment success rates of MDR TB patients have remained stable but at a very low level: only one in every three (34%) patients in the reporting EU/EEA countries finishes MDR TB treatment successfully. More than half die, fail treatment, or are lost to follow-up. At 25%, the treatment success rate for XDR TB patients was even lower.

ECDC Director Marc Sprenger stressed: “If we are not able to diagnose and treat patients with multidrug-resistant tuberculosis early and successfully, this not only puts patients’ lives at risk but also paves the way for XDR TB. [This is why it is essential to enable healthcare workers across Europe to fully support all MDR TB patients during the full course of treatment and make sure they finish it successfully.](#)”

“There is an urgent need for new anti-TB medicines with shorter and more effective treatment regimens and we must reach all patients, not only half of them and ‘half the way’”, says **Zsuzsanna Jakab, WHO Regional Director for Europe**. “For the first time in 40 years, new TB drugs have become available but their scope is limited to specific groups of patients. Other drugs are currently under clinical trial. A key objective for new treatments should be to reduce the treatment duration from two years to two weeks. We need to put patients at the centre of care in the spirit of *Health 2020*.”

1/3

The goal to eliminate TB by 2050 depends on the development of new drugs together with diagnostics and vaccines. WHO is working in close collaboration with the Stop TB Partnership to enable and promote research to develop new diagnostics, drugs and vaccines. In 2013, WHO developed guidance for introduction of new medicines. ECDC plans to develop specific guidance to assist EU Member States with the introduction of new tuberculosis drugs.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

World TB 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.

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).

The **WHO Consolidated Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Multidrug- and Extensively Drug-Resistant Tuberculosis in the WHO European Region 2011–2015** aims to strengthen efforts to address the alarming problem of drug-resistant TB in the Region. Diagnosing 85% or 225 000 M/XDRTB patients and treating at least 75% of them successfully are key 2015 targets of the plan that all European countries subscribed to in 2011.

The long-term goal of the **Framework Action Plan to fight tuberculosis in the European Union** is to control and ultimately eliminate TB in the EU/EEA countries. The Action Plan aims to increase political and public awareness of TB as a public health issue in the EU; support and strengthen EU Member States' efforts against TB in line with the national epidemiological situation and challenges and aims to contribute to the control of TB in the EU, by supporting those countries from which imported cases originate.

Drug-resistant tuberculosis is manmade and results from inadequate treatment management of TB patients like irregular treatment regimen prescription, poor compliance with treatment plans or sub-optimal dosing due to biological variations in drug uptake. The key to preventing the development of drug resistance, multi-drug resistance or extensively drug resistance is to provide patients with the correct multidrug TB treatment regimen for the entire treatment time.

Developing new anti-TB drugs is a complex process and requires high economic investments. These life-saving drugs should be broadly accessible to all patients in need. Better incentives are needed to encourage more Research and Development (R&D), including defining innovative incentives and developing new business models.

Health 2020 is the new European health policy framework. It aims to support action across government and society to: "significantly improve the health and well-being of populations, reduce health inequalities, strengthen public health and ensure people-centred health systems that are universal, equitable, sustainable and of high quality".

Information sources:

- [ECDC/WHO: Tuberculosis surveillance and monitoring in Europe 2014](#)

ECDC resources include:

- [ECDC technical report: Health care system factors influencing treatment results of MDR TB patients](#)
- [World Tuberculosis Day 2014](#)
- [ECDC Evidence-based guidance on the Management of Contacts to MDR TB and XDR TB contacts](#)
- [Investigation and control of tuberculosis incidents affecting children in congregate settings](#)
- [Framework Action Plan to fight tuberculosis in the European Union](#)
- [ECDC/ERS European Standards for Tuberculosis Care](#)

WHO resources include:

- [World Tuberculosis Day 2014, Stop TB Partnership, 2014](#)
- [Roadmap to prevent and combat drug-resistant tuberculosis. Consolidated Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Multidrug- and Extensively Drug-resistant Tuberculosis \(M/XDR-TB\) in the WHO European Region 2011–2015. Copenhagen WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2011](#)
- [Tuberculosis, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2013](#)
- [Health 2020. A European policy framework and strategy for the 21st century. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2013](#)

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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.