

Center for Global Health Policy

Promoting Evidence-based US Action on Global HIV and Tuberculosis

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Deadly TB Germs Becoming More Drug Resistant and Widespread

Aggressive U.S. Response Needed to Combat Growing Global Threat of Multidrug-Resistant TB and Extensively Drug-Resistant TB

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WASHINGTON—Urgent U.S. action is required to address massive gaps in our ability to measure, treat, and prevent virulent new strains of drug-resistant tuberculosis, according to a new Global Center report, “Death by Drug-Resistant TB and How to Stop It.”

Better laboratories and rapid new diagnostics are among the vital steps needed to combat this growing global health threat, the new report says. Because of poor surveillance, antiquated diagnostics, and inadequate lab capacity, the vast majority of people with drug-resistant TB are never diagnosed or treated. This is a recipe for the increasing spread of MDR and XDR-TB, as undiagnosed patients continue to transmit the deadly bug to others in their communities.

The report comes on the heels of findings by the World Health Organization that MDR-TB is at record high levels in some regions of the world. TB is the second leading infectious disease killer of adults in the world. This ancient but advancing scourge claims 1.8 million lives a year—one person every 20 seconds.

“Drug-resistant TB is a stealth killer, going undetected and undiagnosed as it claims thousands of lives across the globe. The emergence of drug-resistant TB is a red flag that our TB control programs globally are failing to detect and treat TB,” Dr. Celine Gounder, a member of the Infectious Diseases Society of America, a TB/HIV specialist at Johns Hopkins University, and the Director for Delivery for the Consortium to Respond Effectively to the AIDS/TB Epidemic (CREATE). “Unless we act quickly and decisively, this global health storm will land on our shores. Our best defense is to invest in global TB control.”

Without aggressive U.S. action, the Global Center report says, we risk a return to the pre-antibiotic era in which our medical arsenal is no match for this advancing disease. With drug-resistant TB just an airplane ride away, this is not just about helping the developing world stave off an emerging global health threat. It’s also about protecting U.S. citizens.

The Global Center’s urges the White House and Congress to lead in an aggressive response that includes these specific steps:

- A Presidential Initiative on Tuberculosis to bring together a focused and coordinated response to TB, domestically and globally.
- A call to Congress to step up funding for TB programming to expand treatment for both drug-susceptible and drug resistant TB to save lives and reduce transmission.
- A bold new research agenda for TB drugs and diagnostics, including expanded clinical trial capacity at the NIH and the CDC to evaluate new tools to diagnose TB, especially point-of-care diagnostics, for drug-susceptible and drug-resistant tuberculosis.
- A ramped-up U.S. role in supporting international efforts to strengthen and sustain TB laboratory capacity.

For more information or to schedule an interview with a physician-scientist expert on this issue, contact Deirdre Shesgreen at 703-740-4954 or dshesgreen@idsociety.org.

The Center for Global Health Policy is an organization of physicians and scientists dedicated to promoting the effective use of U.S. funding for addressing the global HIV/AIDS and TB epidemics by providing scientific and policy information to policymakers, federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the media. The Center, a project of the Infectious Diseases Society of America and its sister organization, the HIV Medicine Association, is based in Arlington, Va.