

# NEWS

## WHO: Drug-Resistant Tuberculosis a Growing Problem

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March 18, 2013

Drug-resistant tuberculosis is a growing problem worldwide, the World Health Organization warned Monday.

The organization says that without expanded treatment, global gains in fighting the disease "can be easily lost." In recent years, overall tuberculosis incidence has declined, but the bacteria that causes the disease is quickly developing resistance to many of the dozen-or-so drugs used to treat it. In South Africa, there have been reports of totally drug-resistant tuberculosis. Worldwide, the disease kills about 1.4 million people annually, more than any infectious disease besides HIV.

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"We are treading water at a time when we desperately need to scale up our response to [multi-drug resistant] TB," Margaret Chan, Director General of WHO, said in a statement.

The group suggests that the disease costs nearly \$5 billion annually to treat—about \$3.2 billion of which can be paid for by the 118 countries where the disease is most prevalent. It says an additional \$1.6 billion is needed to pay for drugs that could save as many as 6 million lives between 2014-2016.

Because several new drugs are being developed to treat TB, with one recently approved by the Food and Drug Administration, WHO has not officially defined totally drug-resistant tuberculosis as an official disease.

"One needs to be a bit cautious about calling it totally drug resistant—at this point, with the current tests we have, it's not possible to define that," says Karin Weyer, coordinator of WHO's Stop TB department on drug resistance. "It still shows we have to cure these patients the first time around—every time they get treated again, you run the risk of amplifying the resistance."

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A tuberculosis patient is given medication in New Delhi. Drug-resistant strains are threatening to cause a public health nightmare.