

FACT SHEET: CHILDREN AND TUBERCULOSIS

THE NATURE AND MAGNITUDE OF TB AMONG CHILDREN

- TB is one of the top ten killers of children worldwide. In 2009, over 1 million children developed TB and at least 176,000 died as a result.
- In developing countries children make up 20-40% of all TB cases, disproportionately affecting children who are orphaned, malnourished, and HIV positive.
- Children have less developed immune systems and are more susceptible to getting severe forms of TB, such as TB meningitis, that are often fatal.
- Because they are less likely to be infectious, children are given low priority within national health programs. Few resources are put towards preventing, diagnosing, and treating TB in children.

DIFFICULTIES DIAGNOSING AND TREATING TB IN CHILDREN

- There is no definitive 'gold standard' for diagnosing TB in children. Although there have been recent advancements in TB diagnostics, these have not been approved for use in children.
- Children are repeatedly excluded from clinical trials and almost no child-friendly TB drugs exist.
- Drugs to treat MDR-TB are very toxic to young children and cause deafness, vomiting, and thyroid problems.
- Although many children are given a vaccine to protect against TB, immunity from the vaccine wears off with age and causes adverse effects in children with HIV.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Fighting childhood TB must become a global health priority. New resources are needed to eliminate TB as a top killer of children.
- TB services should be integrated with child health programs, including HIV services.
- Children need to be involved in clinical trials for TB so that child-friendly drugs and diagnostics can be developed.
- All children who have been in contact with an adult who has TB should be given Isoniazid preventive therapy (IPT), which is effective at preventing the disease from becoming active.

SOURCES

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