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TB deaths increase first time in over a decade: WHO 2021 report

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Reversals in progress mean that the global TB targets are off track and appear increasingly out of reach



The COVID-19 pandemic has reversed years of global progress in tackling tuberculosis and for the first time in over a decade, TB deaths have increased, according to the World Health Organization's 2021 Global TB report.

In 2020, more people died from TB, with far fewer people being diagnosed and treated or provided with TB preventive treatment compared with 2019, and overall spending on essential TB services falling.

The first challenge is disruption in access to TB services and a reduction in resources. In many countries, human, financial and other resources have been reallocated from tackling TB to the COVID-19 response, limiting the availability of essential services.

The second is that people have struggled to seek care in the context of lockdowns.

WHO estimates that some 4.1 million people currently suffer from TB but have not been diagnosed with the disease or have not officially reported to national authorities. This figure is up from 2.9 million in 2019.

Funding in the low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) that account for 98% of reported TB cases also remains a challenge.

Thus, the report calls on countries to put in place urgent measures to restore access to essential TB services. It further calls for a doubling of investments in TB research and innovation as well as concerted action across the health sector and others to address the social, environmental and economic determinants of TB and its consequences.