



Family Digest 71

March 2026

Tuberculosis (TB): Progress and Challenges

World TB Day 2026's theme is "[Yes! We can end TB: Led by countries, powered by people](#)" while Deputy President Paul Mashatile led South Africa's World TB Day commemorations under the theme "Yes! You and I Can End TB". TB remains one of the world's deadliest infectious killers, and recent years have seen a worrying increase in drug-resistant TB. Each day, over 3 300 people die from TB, and more than 29 000 people fall ill with this preventable and curable disease. Global efforts to combat TB have saved an estimated 83 million lives since 2000; however, cuts in global health funding are threatening to reverse these gains. As countries marked World TB Day on 24th March, the World Health Organization (WHO) urged governments and partners to prioritize TB as a central pillar of health security and universal health coverage because, despite decades of medical advances and international commitments to eliminate TB, it remains the leading cause of death from a single infectious agent worldwide.

<https://www.spotlightnsp.co.za/2026/03/18/the-fight-against-tb-is-also-the-fight-for-human-rights-2/>

South Africa has one of the world's highest TB burdens and it is one of the country's most pressing public health challenges. South Africa remains on the lists of 30 high burden countries for TB, HIV-associated TB (TB/HIV), and drug-resistant TB (DR-TB), accounting for a significant share of the global TB epidemic. Additionally, more than half of notified TB patients (54 per cent) were co-infected with HIV, highlighting the need for an integrated response to both epidemics.

https://www.health.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/TB-Recovery-Plan-4_final_250526.pdf

According to the [National Department of Health](#), an estimated 270 000 people contracted TB in 2023 in South Africa. In the same year there were an estimated 56 000 TB-related deaths, with the provincial hotspots of the [Eastern Cape](#), [KwaZulu-Natal](#), and [Western Cape](#) having the highest reported incidences. The epidemic is heavily driven by HIV, and males have three times higher odds of active TB than females. Mineworkers face a disproportionately high risk, with an estimated incidence of 2 500–3 000 cases per 100 000, nearly ten times the general population's rate.¹

https://www.health.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/TB-Recovery-Plan-4_final_250526-1.pdf

South Africa has made notable progress in controlling TB. Since 2015 the rate has declined by 57 per cent, and treatment coverage has increased to 79 per cent. As of March 2026, South Africa is recognized as one of the few high-burden countries to have reached global 2025 targets for reducing the incidence of TB.

<https://tinyurl.com/y3mdu2tt>

South Africa is also a global leader in adopting the six-month BPaLM regimen, an all-oral treatment for drug-resistant TB with success rates exceeding 85 per cent. However, the country is not yet on track to meet the WHO's target to reduce TB deaths by 75 per cent by 2023. The WHO estimates it has only come down by 16 per cent.

End TB Strategy. <https://www.spotlightnsp.co.za/2024/10/30/56-000-tb-deaths-in-sa-in-2023-according-to-who/>

More targeted interventions are required to close remaining gaps in prevention, diagnosis, and treatment. While TB services are free, the income loss and costs incurred by patients on travel, food, nutrition and accommodation can be significant.² Moreover, stigma around TB continues to be a barrier to finding and treating people with the disease. TB is closely intertwined with broader social conditions, including

inequality, unemployment, and the ongoing burden of HIV, and has an impoverishing effect on people who are often already socio-economically vulnerable. These disparities highlight the urgent need for improved treatment success rates, better financial protection, and stronger community-based support mechanisms.³ The World TB Day 2026 theme reflects a shift from reaffirming global ambition to turning commitments into action, led by countries and powered by collective efforts across governments, communities and people affected by TB.

<https://www.stoptb.org/news/world-tb-day-2026-theme-announcement>

By emphasizing country leadership and shared responsibility, the theme reframes the TB response as one that is owned, led, and financed at country level, while being powered by people and partners at all levels. Its structure allows countries and partners to demonstrate leadership and contribution in ways that reflect their specific roles and contexts.

<https://www.stoptb.org/what-we-do/advocate-endtb/world-tb-day/world-tb-day-2026>

The WHO is urging countries to accelerate action to end TB and expand access to lifesaving services by using new innovations such as diagnostic tests that can be used near the point-of-care and tongue swabs that can help detect the disease faster, reaching more people. These portable, simple-to-use tests bring TB diagnosis closer to where people routinely seek care. The tests can operate on battery power and deliver results in less than one hour, allowing patients to start treatment sooner. Through global price negotiations, the cost of the new test has dropped to just **\$3.60** (about R60), giving the South African government the chance to better use existing funds. Unfortunately, the test does not necessarily detect and diagnose Multi-Drug-Resistant TB.

<https://tinyurl.com/yfussmnz>

“Ending TB is possible. Country ownership and sustainability are no longer aspirations, they are imperatives. We are proud to support high-burden countries as they lead the way. The world must match their leadership with investment, innovation, and collective action,” said Dr Lucica Ditiu, Executive Director of the Stop TB Partnership.⁴

Lois Law
Project Co-ordinator
lois@cplo.org.za

¹ https://www.health.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/TB-Recovery-Plan-4_final_250526-1.pdf

² <https://tinyurl.com/2xy6bydr>

³ https://www.health.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/TB-Recovery-Plan-4_final_250526.pdf

⁴ <https://www.stoptb.org/what-we-do/advocate-endtb/world-tb-day/world-tb-day-2026>