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Drug-resistant Tuberculosis continues to spread: new report. Concern about childhood TB.

A new report, Tuberculosis surveillance in Europe 2009, a joint publication from the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the WHO Regional Office for Europe to mark World Tuberculosis Day 2011, provides evidence for concern about the spread of multi-drug resistant tuberculosis (MDR TB) and the persistence of TB among children. Concerted action is being undertaken in developing a regional MDR TB plan as well as addressing childhood TB.

While the EU/EEA Member States continue to mark a decline in the overall notification, the report highlights the need to address childhood TB as a key component on the way towards TB elimination: Almost 40,000 TB cases in children were notified in the past decade with more than 3,300 reported cases in 2009. In addition, only 19 per cent of all childhood TB cases were confirmed bacteriologically – clearly indicating that TB diagnosis in children remains a major challenge even within the EU/EEA.

In the WHO European region the notification rates of TB have been declining since 2005 with a regional average of 36.8 notifications per 100 000 population in 2009. However, notification rates of newly-detected and relapse TB cases in 18 high priority countries¹ remain almost eight times higher than in the rest of the Region (73.0 compared to 9.2 per 100 000).

Treatment outcome rates are the lowest recorded globally with the highest multi drug resistant (MDR-TB) rates in the world recorded within the region. The number of deaths and patients lost to follow-up are still a matter for concern. Vulnerable populations, including children, still do not have ready access to quality and timely diagnosis and treatment. This remains a matter of urgency given the high prevalence of Multi-/Extensively drug-resistant TB (M/XDR-TB) in the Region. In response to the threat of M/XDR-TB, the WHO Regional Office for Europe and its partners are finalising a Consolidated Action Plan for M/XDR-TB setting a five year strategy to curb the TB drug resistance epidemic in the Region.

Progress towards TB elimination across Europe can only be achieved by addressing the most vulnerable when it comes to TB control and prevention: children. ECDC – in collaboration with the Stop TB Partnership – convened global experts in the field of childhood TB in a meeting in Stockholm during 17 and 18 March 2011 to identify possible strategies to improve diagnostics, treatment and prevention in the field of paediatric TB.

On the occasion, ECDC Director Dr Marc Sprenger, stressed: “Preventing TB infection in children is vital on the way to a TB-free generation in Europe. We need to show serious commitment to improve rapid and quality diagnosis as well as better treatment among children suffering from Tuberculosis.”

“The problem of drug resistant TB needs bold and concrete actions: failure is not an option. This is why I have set up a Special Project to Prevent and Combat M/XDR-TB” says Zsuzsanna Jakab, WHO Regional Director for

Europe. "An important part of our work with scientific and research institutes, and for the Consolidated Action Plan, will be on new and rapid child-friendly diagnostic tools and treatment".

The spread of antimicrobial resistance will be in the spotlight again on World Health Day, 7 April, which this year highlights this urgent problem not only for TB but for all infections which are increasingly difficult to treat because of drug resistance.

World TB Day: 24th March every year marks World Tuberculosis Day in an attempt to raise public awareness about the epidemic. On that day in 1882, Dr. Robert Koch announced his discovery of the TB bacillus paving the way for diagnosis and treatment of TB.

WHO European Region: The region comprises 53 countries plus Liechtenstein, with a population of 894.5 million with more than 504 million people (56 per cent) living in the EU/EEA region (27 EU Member States plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway).

Download the report *Tuberculosis surveillance in Europe 2009* at <http://ecdc.europa.eu>

Spotlight on Childhood TB: "Tackling tuberculosis in children: towards a TB-free generation"
www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/healthtopics/spotlight/spotlight_tuberculosis_2011/Pages/index.aspx

International Childhood Tuberculosis Meeting 2011, Stockholm 17 – 18 March 2011
http://ecdc.europa.eu/en/press/events/Lists/Events/ECDC_DispForm.aspx?List=43564830-6b8a-442f-84e7-2495fa49489b&ID=125&RootFolder=%2Fen%2Fpress%2Fevents%2FLists%2FEvents

Visit the WHO website: <http://www.euro.who.int>

Visit the Stop TB partnership website: <http://www.stoptb.org>

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The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) is an EU agency tasked with identifying assessing and communicating threats to human health posed by infectious diseases. It supports the work of public health authorities in the EU and EEA/EFTA Member States.

¹ The 18 high priority countries are: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.