

In advance of World TB Day, to be observed on 24 March, World Health Organization (WHO) is calling for an urgent investment of resources, support, care and information into the fight against tuberculosis (TB).

WHO is sounding the alarm, as we enter the era of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Ending tuberculosis (TB) by 2030 is a target of the SDGs and the goal of the WHO End TB Strategy.

Although 66 million lives have been saved since 2000, the COVID-19 pandemic has reversed those gains. For the first time in over a decade, TB deaths increased in 2020.

Ongoing conflicts across Eastern Europe, Africa and the Middle East have further exacerbated the situation for vulnerable populations.

Global spending on TB diagnostics, treatments and prevention in 2020 were less than half of the global target of US\$ 13 billion annually by 2022.

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said; “For research and development, an extra US\$ 1.1 billion per year is needed.

“Urgent investments are needed to develop and expand access to the most innovative services and tools to prevent, detect and treat TB that could save millions of lives each year, narrow inequities and avert huge economic losses,” He explained

“These investments offer huge returns for countries and donors, in averted health care costs and increased productivity.” He added

Investments in TB programmes have demonstrated benefits not just for people with TB but for health systems and pandemic preparedness.

WHO is calling for a need to catalyse investment and action to accelerate the development of new tools, especially new TB vaccines.

Between 2018–2020, 20 million people were reached with TB treatment. This is 50% of the 5-year target of 40 million people reached with TB treatment for 2018-2022.

During the same period 8.7 million people were provided TB preventive treatment. This is 29% of the target of 30 million for 2018-2022.

In 2020, the situation was worse for children, an estimated 63% of children and young adolescents below 15 years with TB were not reached with or not officially reported to have accessed life-saving TB diagnosis and treatment services; the proportion was even higher – 72% – for children under 5 years.

Almost two thirds of eligible children under 5 did not receive TB preventive treatment and therefore remain at risk of illness.

COVID-19 has had a further negative and disproportionate impact on children and adolescents with TB or at risk, with increased TB transmission in the household.

TB remains one of the world's deadliest infectious killers. Each day, over 4 100 people lose their lives to TB and close to 30 000 people fall ill with this preventable and curable disease.

Ending TB requires concerted action by all sectors. On World TB Day, WHO calls on everyone- individuals, communities, societies, donors and governments to do their part to end TB.