

Tackle TB, prevent future pandemics, report finds

TB is one of the oldest pandemics the world over, and may hold the key to preventing new pandemics, a new [report](#) has found.



Source: [Pexels](#)

Published in the UK parliament ahead of World TB Day, 24 March, the report highlights several areas where World Health Organization-recommended programmes for strengthening pandemic preparedness overlap with existing tuberculosis (TB) programmes, including prevention, detection, response, and innovation. TB kills more people every year than any other infectious disease.

Like Covid-19, it is a respiratory pathogen, spread through the air when people cough or sneeze. Last year, 1.6 million people worldwide died from TB, an increase on previous years that has been partially attributed to TB health services and resources being redeployed to fight Covid-19 instead.

Nick Herbert, chair of the Global TB Caucus and an expert cited in the report, said, “Through exploring how systems built for TB were deployed to help tackle Covid-19, we can identify areas of strength in our public health systems. And by understanding where the existing response to TB is underpowered, we can identify areas where investments in pandemic preparedness can serve a dual purpose: preparing for the next pandemic while tackling the world’s leading killer among established epidemics.”

“ [#YesWeCanEndTB](#) by investing US\$ 5 billion annually to accelerate the R&D of new diagnostics, medicines and vaccines. [#WorldTBDAY #EndTB pic.twitter.com/5csTzBAUBY](#)— Stop TB Partnership (@StopTB) [March 21, 2023](#) ”

The report uses real-life examples of excellence from across Africa to illustrate the power of investing in TB to fight future pandemics:

- In Nigeria, Epcon AI’s digital surveillance system built for TB was used by partners to identify vulnerable and underserved populations for Covid-19.

- In South Africa, Task and Satvi, two clinical research organisations deployed their expertise from TB to help develop new products for Covid-19.
- In Uganda, village health teams who usually support TB patients access care, helped raise the alarm over a recent outbreak of Ebola.
- In Zambia, the university teaching hospital in Lusaka redeployed its multi-drug resistant TB ward to treat Covid-19 patients.

“I’m proud to see the university teaching hospital in Lusaka’s work identified as an example of global excellence on pandemic preparedness,” said Christopher Kalila, member of parliament in Zambia and co-chair of the Global African TB Caucus, a pan-African network of MPs who collaborate to campaign for action on TB.

“But we can and should do a lot more on TB. As this report shows, if governments invest in TB programmes, they can build systems and services that can save lives in the event of a future pandemic.”

According to the report co-authors, the opportunities for dual impact are key. “Governments do not have a lot of resources for health programmes,” said Janika Hauser, TB researcher and co-author of the report.

“No one can afford to spend money on systems that won’t be used until the next pandemic, but they don’t have to. By making the right targeted investments, governments can have an immediate, tangible impact on the fight against TB, and meet international guidelines to prepare for future pandemics. It’s a win-win.”

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