

Technical Reports

Who predicts increase in tuberculosis deaths: Map shows fatal spread of TB epidemic

At least thirty million people will have died from tuberculosis between 1990 and 1999, with deaths from the disease increasing in all parts of the world and doubling in Africa during this decade, the World Health Organization's Executive Board was told today. The annual tuberculosis death toll is expected to reach 3.5 million by the year 2000.

"This tragedy is totally unnecessary", said Dr Hiroshi Nakajima, Director-General of WHO. "We have the tools and cost-effective strategy to control this disease. There is no rational reason why tuberculosis deaths should be allowed to continue to increase. Nearly half of these 30 million deaths could be avoided if more partners step forward and commit themselves to making tuberculosis control a high priority. This must include governments, nongovernmental organizations and the private sector in both wealthy countries and less developed countries. We need to encourage every country in the world to adopt WHO's proven tuberculosis control measures".

A map produced by the WHO Tuberculosis Programme shows the worldwide impact of the disease. The worst affected area is south and south-east Asia, where approximately 12 million deaths

from TB are estimated for the 1990s. A further seven million deaths in east Asia and Pacific are estimated, with six million in sub-Saharan Africa, and three million in north Africa and the Middle East.

WHO's tuberculosis experts calculate that about 1.2 million deaths from the disease will occur in Latin America and the Caribbean during the 1990s, along with 300000 in eastern Europe, 70000 in western Europe, 40000 in Japan, 20000 in North America, and 2000 in Australia and New Zealand.

The map (see attached) is contained in a progress report on the Tuberculosis Programme, submitted to the Executive Board during its 93rd session in Geneva.

"Unless there are sharp changes in global funding priorities and national control efforts, the tuberculosis epidemic can be expected to worsen", Dr Ralph Henderson, WHO Assistant Director-General said today. He added: "There is a need to intensify and expand national and international action to contain the tuberculosis epidemic throughout the world".

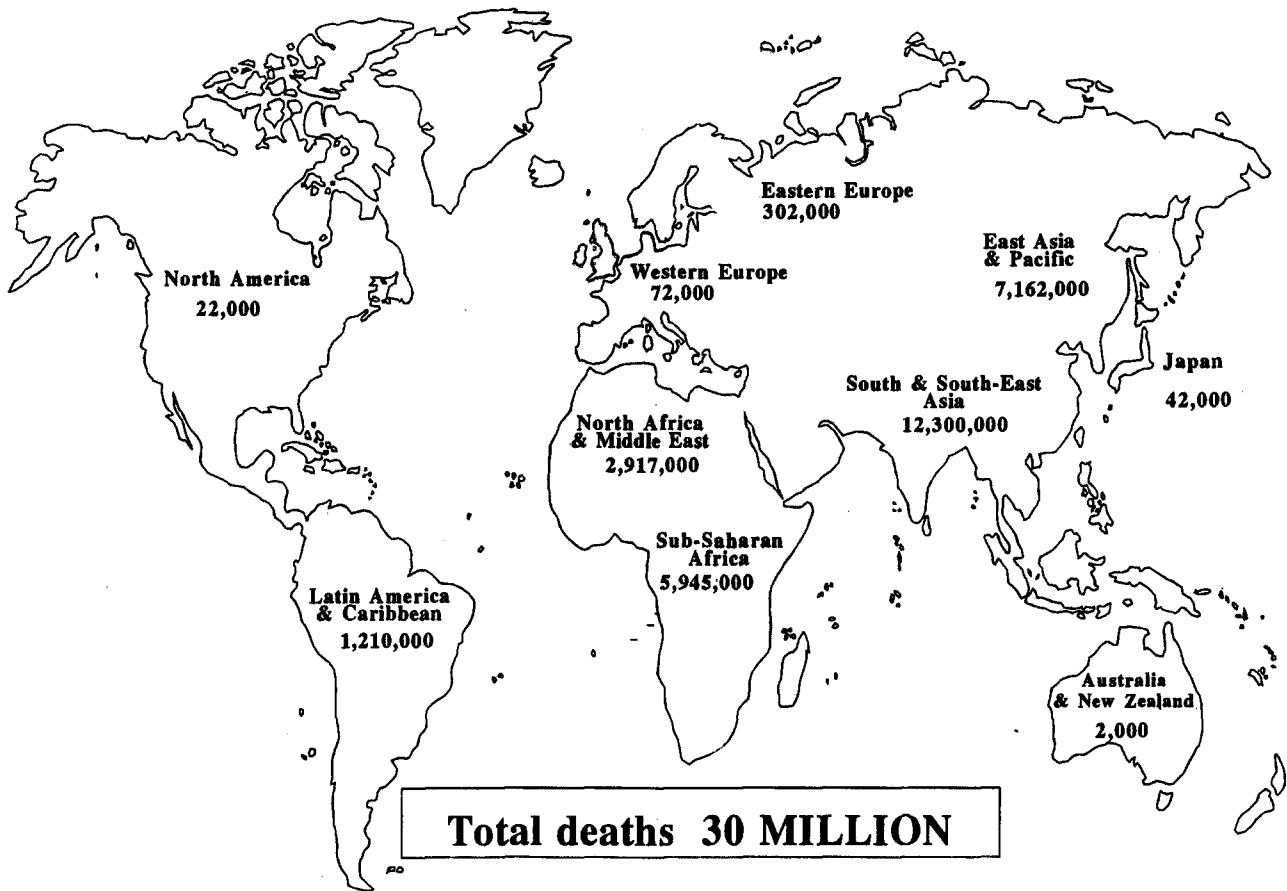
The report predicts that a cumulative total of more than 90 million new cases of the disease will have occurred between 1990 and the year 2000.

"Conservative estimates by region indicate that the incidence can be expected to increase to 8.8 million cases annually by 1995, and 10.2 million by the year 2000". Poor quality TB control programmes, exacerbated by demographic factors – for example, population growth and changes in the age structure of populations – will account for about three-quarters of the predicted increase in new cases.

The spread of HIV will account for most of the other 25 per cent. The AIDS virus destroys the human cells that keep the tuberculosis bacteria dormant. While in 1990, HIV was a factor in four per cent of all TB cases, that burden will increase to 14 per cent by the year 2000, representing an increase from 300000 to 1.4 million HIV-associated TB cases, according to the report.

The report warns of the growing threat in a number of countries of multidrug-resistant (MDR) tuberculosis. Only a minority of MDR cases are curable, and the cost of treatment can be as high as US\$ 250000 per case. "This means that for those who develop the disease in the developing world, MDR tuberculosis is a virtual death sentence", said Dr Arata Kochi, Manager of the WHO Tuberculosis Programme.

ESTIMATED CUMULATIVE TUBERCULOSIS DEATHS 1990-1999



WHO declared tuberculosis a global emergency last April, and has said that aid agencies should spend more than US\$ 100 million a year, seven times their current annual amount, on effective treatment

programmes in every region of the world. By doing so, about 12 million people who would otherwise be expected to die from TB in the next ten years could be saved, WHO experts believe.

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