

World Tuberculosis Day 2017: India still has 24 per cent of world's TB cases



Continuing the fight to eradicate tuberculosis from India, which has 24 per cent of the world's total number of TB cases, the Indian Society for Clinical Research or ISCR called for a comprehensive research in multi-drug resistant TB. Reports show that the disease kills 480,000 to 500,000 Indians every year, making it a big challenge for India to achieve its goal of being TB free by 2025. According to the World Health Organisation, it is the world's top infectious disease killer and 5000 people die because of it every day. It ranks among the top 10 global causes of death, and in 2015 alone, a million children below the age of 14 years worldwide were diagnosed with TB and 1,70,000 of them died. 10-15 per cent of TB patients are under the age of 14.

In a 2012 national report titled 'TB in India', 81,482 cases of TB that were reported were among children, which was about seven per cent of the total number of cases in the country. Malnutrition among children in the country make them very susceptible to the disease when they are below the age of five. In India, 39 per cent of the children have stunted growth (low height for weight) while 21 per cent are wasted (low weight for height) and 36 per cent are underweight, according to National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 4. Poor hygiene and sanitation, and other reasons such as HIV, alcohol use, tobacco, and diabetes puts people at very high levels of risk of contracting TB.

"Undernutrition lowers the body's immunity, making it easier for the bacteria to attack an individual and makes the fight against tuberculosis more difficult," Sunil Kumar Mehendiratta, Senior Consultant and HOD, Department of Paediatrics at Venkateshwar Hospital, Dwarka, New Delhi told IANS. However, he adds that contrary to popular belief, it isn't only children who live in unhygienic conditions and slums who are diagnosed with TB, people from relatively affluent backgrounds are diagnosed with the disease too.

WHO data shows India has the most number of TB cases among the six countries that account for 60 per cent of total cases worldwide. Indonesia, China, Nigeria, Pakistan and South Africa rank after India.

"There has been a steep rise in TB cases among children in India. In a month, I see nearly seven to 10 new cases. It is sad to see children below the age of five visiting OPDs with TB. The most unfortunate part is the lack of awareness, proper diagnosis and treatment in case of childhood TB," Rahul Nagpal, Director (Department of Paediatrics) at Fortis Flt Lt Rajan Dhall Hospital, New Delhi, told IANS.

Tuberculosis is caused by mycobacterium tuberculosis bacterium that most often begins by affecting the lungs and can then spread to other body parts. The disease can be combated best through a strict diet and food supplements, that ensure malnourished children do not have a relapse.

“Fighting TB requires a diet rich in fats, vitamins, minerals and proteins. Immediate interventions should include food supplementation programmes, such as the Public Distribution System, Integrated Child Development Services and Mid-day Meal Programme which can enhance the value of foods supplied and target families who actually need them,” Jamhoih Tonsing, Regional Director at The International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (The Union) – South-East Asia Office, told IANS.