

## Protecting Your Workforce from Tuberculosis



### An Introduction to TB Management in the Workplace

World Economic Forum  
Global Health Initiative  
in cooperation with



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## Rationale

Businesses have long-term interests in ensuring the national development of human capital to drive economic development and ensure market growth. Tuberculosis undermines all of this.

## The management of Tuberculosis is an economic issue

Tuberculosis (TB) is treatable and curable. Globally, though, almost 1.7 million people die from TB each year. They are mostly adults in their productive prime between the ages of 15 and 54. Everyone loses:

- **Businesses lose.** Workers are as vulnerable to TB as anyone else. A sick worker means disrupted workflow, reduced productivity, weeks or months of absenteeism and the direct costs of treatment. This adds up to substantial costs to companies, individual workers and their families.
- **Businesses and communities lose.** TB is a major contributor to ill health and poverty in the community. The success of a business is closely linked to the community's health and prosperity. The community is a source of workers, services, contractors and consumers; it is a key part of the overall business environment.
- **Businesses, communities and countries lose.** The macroeconomic impact of TB should be considered not only in terms of a country's per capita GDP, but also in lost lifespan and lifetime earnings. For example, at the global level, TB leads to a decline in worker productivity to the order of US\$ 12 billion annually. Workers may lose on average 3-4 months of work due to their TB illness.

## TB poses a challenge to India's productivity and future growth

Nearly 1.8 million Indians develop TB each year, of which 0.8 million are infectious. Unless properly treated, infectious pulmonary TB patients can infect up to 10-15 persons each year. In fact, 1,000 people die from the disease each day, the equivalent of two people every three minutes.

The ongoing emergence of MDR-TB, in which the bacteria have become resistant to at least two of the most important anti-Tuberculosis drugs, is causing the situation to deteriorate since these cases require longer periods of treatment with costlier and less potent drugs and with less chance of success than standard TB. Most second-line drugs have a shorter shelf life and global production of quality-assured drugs is limited. In addition, drug registration is often a lengthy and costly process that is not always attractive to drug manufacturers. Further, the treatment may need to be changed due to side effects, delayed Drug Susceptibility Test (DST) results or poor response to treatment. MDR-TB is a concern for Tuberculosis control in many countries.

Currently, the prevalence of MDR-TB among new cases in India is relatively low. Studies carried out in six districts during 1999-2002 using the WHO guidelines on drug resistance surveillance showed that between 0.5 and 3% of new cases were found to harbour multi-drug resistant bacteria. Studies of previously-treated patients showed MDR-TB levels of 12%.

## The Indian Government is tackling TB

The Government of India's Revised National TB Control Programme (RNTCP), run by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, is based on the WHO recommended strategy of DOTS. Since 1997, more than 5 million TB patients have been treated under the programme and almost 1 million additional lives have been saved. Further measures are being taken within the RNTCP to address the MDR-TB problem through appropriate management of patients and strategies to prevent the propagation and dissemination of MDR-TB.

The RNTCP recognizes that a multistakeholder approach is needed to achieve its case detection and treatment targets and is already interacting with more than 100 Indian companies.

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## What Can the Business and Public Employment Sectors Do?

There are four ways in which the employment sector can contribute to TB control:

- Provide in-kind services, including core business and implementation skills (marketing, sales and distribution) for management of TB control activities
- Reach TB patients that are not easily covered by the public health system, including potential TB patients among employees and their families, communities surrounding large businesses and industrial units, particularly when located in remote or rural environments
- Support existing activities through in-kind product donations (e.g. drugs, diagnostics, IT equipment and other commodities) and direct funding for TB control activities
- Help reduce the stigma attached to the disease and discrimination suffered by patients by ensuring that they don't lose their jobs, and publicly promote and enable TB care for those who suffer from the disease

Simply put, employers can provide a synergistic means to run TB control programmes. So, where should a business start?

### Manage TB in the workplace: it makes good business sense

Indian businesses have a unique role to play in the control of TB since they have the management skills, existing health infrastructures and large workforces (among which many may be suffering from TB). These strengths, combined with the technical expertise and resources available under RNTCP, can provide a critical mass of resources for successful TB control.

The workplace is a win-win setting for TB management:

- **For the worker**, the workplace is an ideal place to gain awareness of and receive treatment for TB. Importantly, good workplace activities can significantly help to minimize the stigma of TB among employees.
- **For the company**, TB management saves on costs by reducing absenteeism and staff turnover through prompt diagnosis and effective treatment and by reducing transmission to other workers. TB management in the workplace also provides an opportunity for businesses to concretely demonstrate their social commitment—part of a “local license to operate.”

- **For communities**, as more people are cured, the cycle of transmission is broken and fewer people are infected. Ultimately, this leads to fewer cases of active TB disease. People are cured and return to an active, productive life. This, in turn, benefits their children and other dependants.

## How Can a Company Initiate TB Control Activities?

### Partner with the public sector to share the load

The Indian RNTCP is keen to support companies that want to fight TB and offers access to a number of benefits either through the World Economic Forum or directly through the Ministry of Health. Contact the local District TB Centre in order to collaborate with and link your workplace TB control activities to the RNTCP\*. In addition, if your workplace has a basic health facility, it can also be linked with the RNTCP, which offers:

- Free technical expertise
- Free technical training
- Free laboratory consumables, registers and patient cards for recording
- Free quality assured drugs in Patient Wise Boxes (PWBs)
- Supportive supervision and external quality assessment of smear microscopy services
- Monitoring and reporting results on a quarterly basis
- Awareness material templates/prototypes

\* The *Directory of State and District TB Officers* is available on [www.tbhindia.org](http://www.tbhindia.org)

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## **Learn from other businesses**

In response to the increasing threat of the TB epidemic on businesses, the India Business Alliance to Stop TB was developed by the World Economic Forum's Global Health Initiative, the first-ever alliance for stimulating business involvement in TB control. In 2004, premier Indian companies, such as Aditya Birla, Larsen and Toubro, Lupin, Modicare Foundation, Novartis India, Reliance Industries and Tata Steel, joined forces with the RNTCP, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), the WHO and the Global Partnership to Stop TB by implementing disease-control activities in their workplaces. The key principle behind the partnership and framework is simple: each partner focuses on their strengths and collaborates in their areas of expertise. The Global Health Initiative is coordinating and facilitating these partnerships and working to extend the participation of the business sector in TB control. All companies, large or small, are welcome to join these public-private partnerships. To learn more about the Alliance, please contact [shaloo.puri@weforum.org](mailto:shaloo.puri@weforum.org). For more information about other such partnerships that help businesses to stop TB, please contact [globalhealth@weforum.org](mailto:globalhealth@weforum.org)

In addition, a number of important case studies are available that illustrate companies that have successfully tackled TB. These are available at [www.weforum.org/globalhealth/cases](http://www.weforum.org/globalhealth/cases).