

Coping with TB in the time of COVID-19

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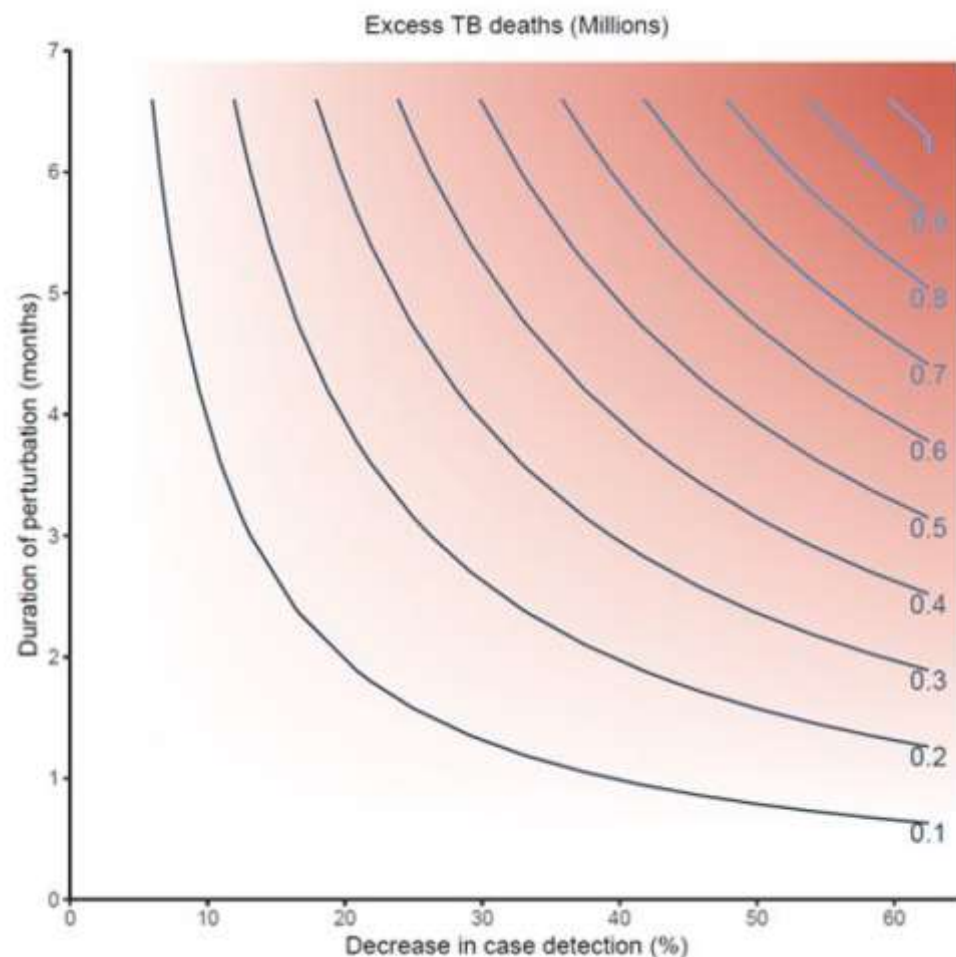


WHO Information Note: Dual burden of TB and COVID-19

- People ill with COVID-19 and TB show **similar symptoms** such as cough, fever and difficulty breathing.
- Both diseases **attack primarily the lungs** and although both biological agents transmit mainly via close contact, the incubation period from exposure to disease in TB is longer, often with a slow onset.
- While experience on COVID-19 infection in TB patients remains limited, it is anticipated that people ill with both TB and COVID-19 may have **poorer treatment outcomes**, especially if TB treatment is interrupted.
- In many countries **restriction of movement** has been imposed for much of the population in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, this has **negatively impacted access to health services for diseases like TB**.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has provoked **social stigma and discriminatory behaviours**, this coupled with pre-existing TB-related stigma can place a heavy burden on patients and their families.

All **measures should be urgently taken to ensure continuity of services** for people who need preventive and curative treatment for TB.

WHO modelling: COVID-19 impact estimated on TB mortality



The estimated additional TB deaths are in excess of an expected 1.47 (uncertainty interval 1.1 – 1.9) million TB deaths that would have been predicted in the absence of the Covid-19 pandemic, based on recent trends prior to 2020.

- For example, **if global TB case detection decreases by an average 25% over a period of 3 months** (as compared to the level of detection before the pandemic), **an additional 190 000 (56 000 – 406 000) TB deaths are predicted (a 13% increase)**, bringing the total to **1.66 (1.3 – 2.1) million TB deaths in 2020**, near the global level of TB mortality of the year 2015, a serious setback in the progress towards the End TB strategy milestones and targets.
- **If case detection drops by 50% over a period of 3 months**, the number of TB deaths, **1.85 (1.4 – 2.4) million (a 26% increase)**, would be back to the level of 2012.

Ensuring continuity of TB services during the COVID-19 pandemic

- **People-centered care:** People-centred outpatient and community-based care strongly preferred where possible and visits to TB treatment centres minimized
- **Prevention and infection control:** Limit transmission of TB and COVID-19 in congregate settings and health care facilities, basic infection prevention and control for health staff and patients, cough etiquette, patient triage. TPT maintained
- **Rapid roll-out of measures to minimize healthcare visits**
 - WHO recommended, all-oral TB treatments for MDR-TB
 - TB preventive treatment with shorter regimens
 - Mechanisms to deliver medicines and collect specimens at home
 - Effective use of digital technologies for patient support, such as AE reporting
- **Diagnosis:** Tests for the two conditions to be made available for individuals with respiratory symptoms, which may be similar for the two diseases. TB laboratory networks and platforms could also be leveraged for the COVID 19 response
- **TB treatment:** Provision of anti-TB treatment, in line with the latest WHO guidelines, must be ensured for all TB patients, including those in COVID-19 quarantine and those with confirmed COVID-19 disease.
- **Digital technologies** intensified to support patients and programmes through improved communication, counselling, care, and information management, among other benefits.
- **Proactive planning,** procurement, supply and risk management to ensure supplies are not interrupted
- **Leveraging capacity:** TB programme staff can share expertise and logistical support, such as in active case finding and contact tracing.

WHO Timeline



31 Dec 2019

[WHO COVID-19 response timeline](#)

29 April 2020

WHO Global TB Programme actions to address TB and COVID-19 with partners and civil society

January- April

Weekly calls with WHO Regional Offices to monitor impact of COVID-19 on TB services

February -March

Internal WHO Taskforce across HQ and regional offices to develop information note on TB and COVID 19. Joint review and inputs from USAID, Stop TB, Global Fund and CSTF

20 March

Launch of TB and COVID information note

24 March

WHO World TB Day Online talk show and joint virtual townhall with Stop TB on TB and COVID. Launch of TB preventive treatment guidelines and operational guide.

4 April

Updated information note on TB and COVID with clinical considerations

12 April

Scientific Brief: BCG vaccination and COVID-19

April

WHO modelling on impact of COVID-19 on TB mortality

Close engagement with Global Fund, Stop TB, USAID and CSTF to support countries

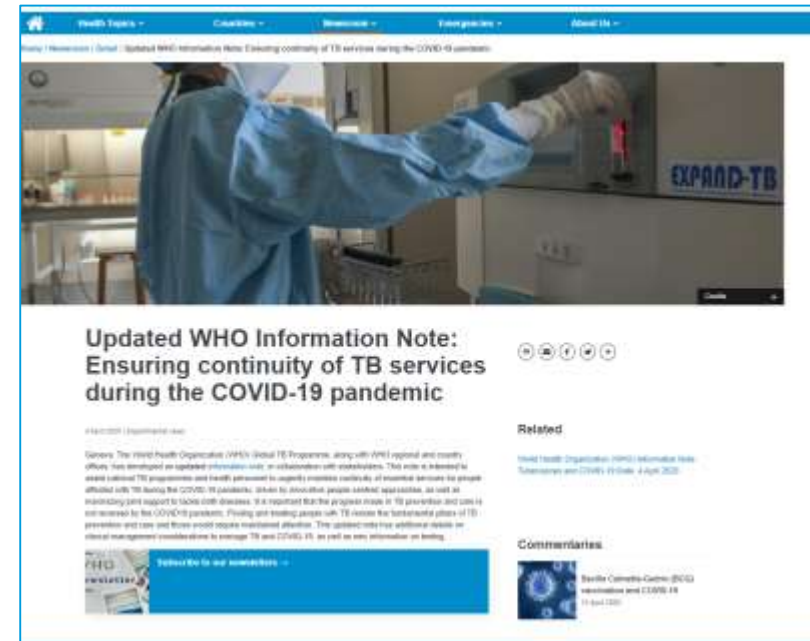
April: Multisectoral Accountability Framework checklist launched and ongoing preparations of UN Secretary General 2020 Progress Report



Key Resources



WHO webpage on COVID-19:
<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>



TB and COVID information on WHO website:
<https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/04-04-2020-updated-who-information-note-ensuring-continuity-of-tb-services-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>