

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Publication

Need to increase public awareness on tuberculosis among children

*Challenges in diagnosis and delayed treatment results in 2 to 7% rise
in TB cases among children in India*

World Tuberculosis Day 2017 - Unite to End TB: Leave No One Behind

New Delhi, March 22, 2017: Tuberculosis can affect any age, caste or class and it is one of the top 10 causes of death across the globe, ranking above HIV and malaria. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), in 2015, there were 10.4 million new cases of TB worldwide. Six countries account for 60% of the total TB deaths, with India leading the count, followed by Indonesia, China, Nigeria, Pakistan and South Africa. As per WHO, each year about 2.2 million people develop TB in India and an estimated 220,000 die from the disease.

However, very few people know that the disease affects children too. In 2015, an estimated 1 million children became affected with TB and 170,000 children died of TB (excluding children with HIV) worldwideⁱ. Almost 10% of total TB cases in India are among children, but only 6% are reportedⁱⁱ. Childhood TB is often not given adequate attention by healthcare providers as it is difficult to diagnose and treat. This **World TB Day, 24 March, 2017**, is an occasion to call for increased public awareness on the rising cases of TB among children. According to **Dr. Rahul Nagpal, Director, Pediatrics, Fortis Flt. Lt. Rajan Dhall Hospital, New Delhi**, "There has been a steep rise in TB cases among children in India. In a month, I see nearly 7 to 10 new cases. It is sad to see children below the age of 5 years in the OPDs with TB but the most unfortunate part is the lack of awareness, proper diagnosis and treatment in case of childhood TB. The youngest TB case handled by me was a 1500 gm baby boy, who was born premature with congenital TB. I have seen other similar cases too but what makes me remember this one was that his mother had uterus TB and was unaware of it. Many people aren't aware that TB can happen anywhere and can transfer from anyone. While 60% of TB in children are pulmonary, the rest 40% are extra-pulmonary and are on rise by 20-30% each year, with people knowing very little about it."

It is important to know that TB is a disease which is preventable and curable. Dealing with childhood TB is difficult and crucial because there are several challenges in diagnosis and treatment. At the time of birth, BCG vaccine is compulsory for children. In case a child under the age of 5 years develops TB symptoms, the mantoux test, a very economical and reliable screening test in adults, is done to detect the signs. However this test may have little value in a child who has already taken the BCG vaccine.

According to TB FACTS.ORGⁱⁱⁱ:

TB case finding & notification statistics for India

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Year	Population of India covered under RNTCP (millions)	People sputum tested	People diagnosed sputum smear positive	Total rate of TB cases notified to RNTCP	Total TB cases notified in the private sector
2010	1,192	7,550,522	939,062	128	n/a
2011	1,210	7,875,158	953,032	125	n/a
2012	1,228	7,867,194	933,905	119	3,106
2013	1,247	8,121,514	928,190	113	38,596
2014	1,266	8,783,551	929,043	114	106,414
2015	1,285	9,132,306	902,732	111	184,802

The rate is the number per 100,000 population.

Signs and symptoms of TB disease in children include^{iv}:

- Cough
- Feelings of sickness or weakness, lethargy, reduced playfulness
- Weight loss or failure to thrive
- Fever, night sweats

Signs of TB in other parts of the body among children depend on the area affected. Infants, young children, and immunocompromised children (e.g., children with HIV) are at the highest risk of developing the most severe forms of TB such as TB meningitis or disseminated TB disease. A pediatric TB expert should be consulted in the treatment of TB in children and infants. It is very important that children or anyone being treated completes the course and takes the medicines exactly as instructed. The medication for children is usually prescribed according to their weights and hence the treatment for each child needs to be customized. Taking blood repeatedly for tests is also a problem as the pain is not easy to bear for them or their parents.

According to **Mr Sandeep Guduru, Facility Director, Fortis Ft. Lt. Rajan Dhall Hospital, New Delhi**, “TB in children is ignored, goes unnoticed and is under-reported. While there are many campaigns to create awareness about pulmonary TB, we need to work more aggressively towards creating knowledge about extra-pulmonary TB cases. Also, the rise in Multi-Drug-Resistance (MDR-TB) among children has drawn very less attention of caregivers. The government and private sector healthcare providers need to come on a single platform to ensure the next generation is TB free.”

While there has been significant progress in the fight against TB, with 43 million lives saved since 2000, the battle is only half-won: over 4 000 people lose their lives each day to this leading infectious disease. Many of the communities that are most burdened by tuberculosis are those that are poor,

vulnerable and marginalized. WHO is calling on countries and partners to "Unite to End Tuberculosis" this year. The call comes as we enter the era of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Ending tuberculosis (TB) by 2030 is a target of the SDGs and the goal of the WHO End TB Strategy.

About Fortis Flt. Lt. Rajan Dhall Hospital

Fortis Flt. Lt. Rajan Dhall Hospital, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi is a 150-bedded NABH accredited multi-specialty, tertiary care hospital providing comprehensive healthcare services. The hospital is a manifestation of Fortis Healthcare's vision of creating a world class integrated healthcare delivery system in India. From basic facilities in Preventive Health and emergency services to super-specialties and sophisticated state-of-the-art Curative technology, the hospital has everything. The healthcare team comprises of experienced healthcare professionals from the premier institutes of the country and abroad providing complete and compassionate patient care.

About Fortis Healthcare Limited

Fortis Healthcare Limited is a leading integrated healthcare delivery service provider in India. The healthcare verticals of the company primarily comprise hospitals, diagnostics and day care specialty facilities. Currently, the company operates its healthcare delivery services in India, Dubai, Mauritius and Sri Lanka with 45 healthcare facilities (including projects under development), approximately 10,000 potential beds and over 346 diagnostic centres.

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ⁱ <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs104/en/>

ⁱⁱ http://www.tballiance.org/sites/default/files/child-resources/Treatment_in_India.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.tbfacts.org/tb-statistics-india/>

^{iv} <https://www.cdc.gov/tb/topic/populations/tbinchildren/>