

# AFGHANISTAN

**92% Policy Alignment**

• **15,000** children estimated to have fallen ill with TB in 2022<sup>i</sup>

• **23%** of children with TB estimated to have missed out on diagnosis and treatment<sup>ii</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

As part of the Test, Avoid, Cure TB in Children (TACTiC) project, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has conducted a survey of paediatric TB policies across 14 countries.

MSF has been working in Afghanistan for over two decades, responding to the immense medical needs caused by decades of conflict and political upheaval. MSF's work in Afghanistan focuses on emergency, maternal, and paediatric healthcare, including a longstanding project on drug-resistant TB (DR-TB) and ongoing efforts to improve the diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of TB in children.

This factsheet compares current paediatric TB policy and implementation in Afghanistan with the most recent World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines, celebrating progress and highlighting areas for improvement. The national TB programme (NTP), ministries and partners should use these findings to develop national paediatric TB roadmaps that set out a clear strategy for ending TB in children.

## DIAGNOSIS



Afghanistan's national TB guidelines are mostly in line with WHO recommendations, allowing children to be enrolled on treatment for drug-susceptible TB (DS-TB) in the absence of bacteriological confirmation, and enabling clinicians to test stool samples for TB. However, the guidelines are not entirely in line with the treatment decision algorithms recommended by WHO, which means some clinical diagnoses may not be evidence-based. Recent WHO data shows that almost a quarter of children with TB miss out on diagnosis and treatment, highlighting ongoing implementation challenges.

## PREVENTION



Afghanistan's national TB guidelines on TB preventive treatment (TPT) include 3HP and 3HR as shorter regimens for children living with HIV and children under the age of 5 who are close contacts of an adult with TB disease. This ensures eligible children can clear their TB infection before it progresses to TB disease more quickly and easily. However, only the medicines required for the 3HP regimen are procured by the NTP, increasing vulnerability to procurement shocks and limiting implementation efforts.

## TREATMENT OF DS-TB



Afghanistan's national guidelines on the treatment of drug-susceptible TB (DS-TB) are currently in line with WHO recommendations. The shorter 4-month regimen for children with non-severe forms of DS-TB is included in the national guidelines, though the survey did not assess how many children are accessing this treatment. Encouragingly, the NTP also procures paediatric formulations of key medicines needed to treat DS-TB in children, which can also be used for the 4-month regimen.

## TREATMENT OF DR-TB



Afghanistan's national TB guidelines are fully in line with the most recent WHO recommendations on the treatment of paediatric drug-resistant TB (DR-TB). This includes treatment regimens containing the most novel antibiotics and the avoidance of harmful injectable drugs for all ages and regardless of HIV status. The Afghan NTP also confirmed that they procure the required paediatric formulations of all DR-TB drugs.

## GLOBAL CALL TO ACTION: TEST, AVOID, CURE TB IN CHILDREN

WHO estimates that 1.25 million children under the age of 14 fall ill with TB each year around the world. Only 51% of these children are diagnosed and reported to NTPs, including just 40% of children under the age of 5 and 20% of children with drug-resistant TB. As a result, a child dies from TB every 3 minutes despite the disease being curable.

While there is an urgent need for better diagnostic tests and treatments for TB in children, Afghanistan and other countries are not yet making the most of the tools already at our disposal. While it is encouraging to see Afghanistan's national TB policies are in line with WHO recommendations, major implementation barriers remain.

Last year, world leaders pledged to accelerate the global fight against TB. Governments, with support from national and international partners, must act now to ensure they don't leave children with TB behind, including by developing national paediatric TB roadmaps.

To find out more about the policy survey and what steps governments, as well as funders and global health actors, can take to test, avoid and cure TB in all children, visit <https://msfaccess.org/tactic-test-avoid-cure-tb-children>.

<sup>i</sup> WHO TB incidence estimates disaggregated by age group, sex and risk factor. CSV file. Available at: <https://www.who.int/teams/global-tuberculosis-programme/data>

<sup>ii</sup> WHO Global TB Report 2023. Available at: <https://www.who.int/teams/global-tuberculosis-programme/tb-reports/global-tuberculosis-report-2023>