

PAKISTAN

85% Policy Alignment

• **82,000** children estimated to have fallen ill with TB in 2022ⁱ

• **28%** of children with TB estimated to have missed out on diagnosis and treatmentⁱⁱ

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.

Pakistan has a high burden of TB and multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB). MSF teams are working to improve access to health care in rural communities, informal settlements and areas affected by conflict, including an ongoing project to improve the diagnosis, prevention and treatment of TB in children.

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

DIAGNOSIS



Pakistan's guidelines on the diagnosis of TB in children are not currently in line with WHO recommendations. While the guidelines do recommend that healthcare workers test stool samples, they fall short by not including WHO-recommended treatment-decision algorithms. The guidelines also do not recommend that children who are very likely to have TB are started on treatment without bacteriological confirmation or an X-ray. Diagnosis is the first hurdle to accessing quality care, and urgent action is needed to address these gaps.

PREVENTION



Pakistan's guidelines on TB preventive therapy (TPT) are in line with WHO recommendations. This includes recommending two short TPT regimens, 3HP and 3HR, for children with HIV and children under the age of 5 who are close contacts of a person with confirmed TB disease. The guidelines also recommend that clinicians enrol these children on TPT without a positive interferon-gamma release assay or tuberculin skin test. The NTP also reports procuring all the paediatric formulations that were surveyed.

TREATMENT OF DS-TB



Pakistan's national guidelines on the treatment of drug-susceptible TB (DS-TB) in children are in line with WHO recommendations. This includes recommending the use of a shorter, 4-month regimen for children with non-severe forms of TB. The NTP also reports that they procure paediatric formulations of all the medicines needed to treat DS-TB, though the survey did not assess how many children are accessing these treatments.

TREATMENT OF DR-TB



Pakistan's national guidelines on the treatment of drug-resistant TB (DR-TB) are in line with current WHO recommendations. This includes recommending all-oral regimens, containing bedaquiline and delamanid, to all eligible children with DR-TB, regardless of age. The NTP also reports that they procure paediatric formulations of all the medicines needed to treat DR-TB, though the survey did not assess how many children are accessing these treatments.

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, these findings demonstrate that Pakistan and other countries are not yet making the most of the tools already at

our disposal. 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.

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>.

ⁱ 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>

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