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HEADLINE: Agency Cites Urgent Need To Fight Increase in TB

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Tuberculosis will claim 30 million lives over the next 10 years unless more money is found to prevent its spread, the World Health Organization said today.

Twelve million of the deaths could be avoided if aid agencies increased spending on treatment programs to \$100 million a year, from about \$15 million now, the United Nations agency said in a report released here.

The agency warned that tuberculosis could become incurable if efforts to control it were not stepped up, because strains of TB resistant to several drugs would continue to multiply if TB programs in poor countries remained underfinanced.

"Tuberculosis is the world's most neglected health crisis," said Dr. Arata Kotchi, head of the agency's tuberculosis program. "How can we ignore a germ that already infects one in every three people on the planet?"

The health agency declared tuberculosis a global emergency in April, noting that it killed more adults each year than all other infectious diseases combined. The agency estimates tuberculosis deaths at three million a year.

Most of the people infected with tuberculosis are in the developing world, but the disease is spreading in industrialized countries. In the United States, 15 million people are infected.

The report said few health treatments were as cost-effective as those for tuberculosis.

"In some parts of the world, the cost of curing TB is as little as 90 cents for every year added to the patient's life," the report said. But less than one-tenth of 1 percent of all external aid is devoted to controlling tuberculosis. In developing countries, where TB is a leading cause of death, tuberculosis control accounts for less than one-fifth of 1 percent of all health expenditures.

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