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On 100th anniversary of world's only tuberculosis vaccine, experts call for greater investment in new vaccine research to end centuries-old disease that still kills over 4,000 people a day

Progress in COVID-19 vaccine development shows the value of investing in vaccines, yet TB vaccine research received 20% of needed funding in 2019

Geneva (July 15, 2021)—On the 100th anniversary of the Bacillus Calmette-Guérin (BCG) vaccine, experts from the Stop TB Partnership, researchers and civil society representatives, called on world leaders to deliver new, effective, safe, equitable and affordable tuberculosis (TB) vaccines by 2025. The experts point to the shortfall in funding needed to achieve this goal, with only US\$117 million invested in TB vaccine research in 2019, against a target of at least US\$550 million per year over a period of four years to achieve the 2025 deadline. By comparison, COVID-19 vaccine research received over US\$100 billion in funding over the past year.

“What the world has achieved in the past year with regards to the development of safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines is astonishing and worth celebrating,” said Dr. Lucica Ditiu, executive director of the Stop TB Partnership.

“Now is the time to invest the same level of energy and funding into developing new vaccines for another airborne, deadly infectious disease—tuberculosis—which has been around for millennia and still kills 4,000 people every day, including 700 children. Today, we call on the world to provide sufficient financial resources and political will by 2023 to allow for the rollout of an effective TB vaccine by 2025. Lessons learned from recent pandemics clearly show that it is possible,” Dr. Ditiu added.

Currently, there is only one vaccine in existence against TB—the BCG vaccine—which was first administered on July 18, 1921. The vaccine has proven effective against TB meningitis and in protecting against severe TB in infants and young children. However, it offers variable and [mostly poor protection](#) against lung disease in adolescents and adults, the populations that are more likely to spread TB in the community.

In 2018, at the United Nations High-Level Meeting on Tuberculosis, world leaders committed to developing new, effective, safe, equitable and affordable TB vaccines as soon as possible but failed to deliver the necessary investments for doing so.

Stop TB Partnership

In 2019, an estimated 10 million people fell ill from TB, and the World Health Organization estimates that in 2020, nearly two million people died from the disease.¹ The worst impacts are felt in some of the poorest parts of the world and among vulnerable groups.

“Despite our best efforts, we are still falling short of targets set at the 2018 United Nations High-Level Meeting on Tuberculosis, and at this rate, we will not meet the Sustainable Development Goals target (SDG 3.3) of ending TB by 2030,” said professor David Lewinsohn, chair of Stop TB Partnership’s the Working Group on New TB Vaccines. “To interrupt ongoing transmission, we need new and more effective vaccines that can prevent TB in adolescents and adults.”

“Effective vaccines are critical to ending the TB epidemic,” said Caroll Nawina, a TB survivor and advocate for policy change at national, regional and international levels. “But having a vaccine is not enough if it is not affordable and accessible to all. The distribution of COVID-19 vaccines has clearly shown the inequalities and inequities of a system that favors the rich. We will not accept such a situation in TB, and we must ensure future TB vaccines reach those most in need.”

More than 15 TB vaccines have been in development for over 15 years, but none of them have been approved for use. However, recent, significant trial results suggest new and effective TB vaccines can be developed in the coming years if appropriate investments are made, with experts today calling for at least US\$550 million in funding per year.

“With multiple vaccine candidates preparing for late-stage efficacy trials and next-generation vaccines based on mRNA² and other novel platforms on the way, there has never been a better time to invest in TB vaccine research and development,” said Lewinsohn.

World leaders of the G7 group of countries [committed](#) recently that they would develop safe and effective vaccines ready to be produced at scale and equitably deployed in under 100 days in the event of future pandemic threats. The ‘100 Days Mission to Respond to Future Pandemic Threats’ details how world leaders can rapidly respond to new disease outbreaks.

“As we welcome the G7’s 100 days commitment to tackle future pandemics, such commitments must be extended to existing pandemics, including tuberculosis, which still causes catastrophic social and economic devastation around the world every year, and particularly among already vulnerable populations,” said Ditiu.

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Notes to editors

¹ <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-tb-detection-and-mortality-in-2020>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/mrna.html>,
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/22221751.2021.1935328>

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- For more on the need for a TB vaccine, visit: https://www.iavi.org/phocadownload/iavi_fact_sheet_need_for_tb_vaccine.pdf
- For more on UNHLM targets and commitments, visit: http://stoptb.org/assets/documents/global/advocacy/unhlm/UNHLM_Targets&Commitments.pdf
- For more on TB research funding trends, visit: https://www.treatmentactiongroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/tbrd_2020_final_web.pdf

About the Stop TB Partnership

The Stop TB Partnership is a unique United Nations hosted entity based in Geneva, Switzerland, committed to revolutionizing tuberculosis (TB) space to end the disease by 2030. The organization aligns more than 2,000 partners worldwide to promote cross-sectoral collaboration. The Stop TB Partnership's various teams and initiatives take bold and smart risks to identify, fund and support innovative approaches, ideas, and solutions to ensure the TB community has a voice at the highest political levels and that all TB affected people have access to affordable, quality, and people-centered care.