Combating Tuberculosis in Children

**Quick Facts**
- At least half a million children become ill with tuberculosis (TB) each year.
- Up to 70 000 children die of TB every year.
- 70-80% of children with TB, have the disease in their lungs (pulmonary TB). The rest are affected by TB disease in other parts of the body (extrapulmonary TB).
- There were over ten million orphans due to parental TB deaths in 2010.

**Factors That Put Children At Risk**
- Any child living in a setting where there are people with infectious TB can become ill with TB, even if they are vaccinated.
- TB illness in children is often missed or overlooked due to non-specific symptoms and difficulties in diagnosis, such as obtaining sputum from young children.
- Children with vulnerable immune systems, such as the very young, HIV-infected or severely malnourished, are most at risk for falling ill or dying from TB.
- Infants and young children are at increased risk of developing severe disseminated disease associated with high mortality, such as TB meningitis or miliary TB.
- Adolescents are at particular risk of developing adult-type disease, i.e. often sputum smear-positive and highly infectious.
- Children with TB are often poor and live in vulnerable communities where there may be a lack of access to health care.
- Newborn children of women with TB are at increased risk of contracting TB. Risks are very high for HIV-infected mothers and children.

**Key Challenges**
- Attention to child TB activities rarely included in strategic plans and budgets of ministries of health.
- Need for better diagnostics that can detect TB in children.
- Recommendations for provision of isoniazid preventive therapy (IPT) for children under 5 years of age rarely implemented.
- Systematic screening for TB not undertaken among children living in households affected by TB.
- Insufficient knowledge of health workers on child TB diagnosis and management issues.
- Current TB vaccine protects young children against the most severe forms of TB, such as meningitis and disseminated TB disease, but does not prevent transmission from an infectious contact.
- Need for increased collaboration between actors in TB and maternal and child health.
- Lack of community knowledge and advocacy.

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* The World Health Organization is preparing new estimates that will be released later in 2012.
Integrated approaches implemented across the health system to address TB in children and pregnant women.

**REACHING THE MDGs**

Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5 aim to reduce deaths among children and pregnant women, while MDG 6 focuses on turning around the TB, HIV and malaria epidemics. These goals cannot be achieved without additional efforts on TB diagnosis and treatment in children as well as pregnant women.

**ROADMAP: KEY ACTIONS TO ADDRESS CHILDHOOD TB**

**Short term (2012-15)**
- Increased action in countries to prioritize childhood TB and implement activities such as contact investigation and IPT to detect and manage TB in children, in line with international standards.
- High profile of childhood TB at the global and national levels.
- Capacity building of health workers scaled up at all levels to detect and manage children with TB.
- Antenatal screening for TB, in tandem with HIV - detect, treat or prevent TB in mothers.
- Research on new diagnostics, drugs and vaccines for childhood TB.
- Improved recording and reporting of data on childhood TB.

**Medium term (2015-18)**
- Improved prevention, detection, diagnosis and management of TB in children.
- Integrated approaches implemented across the health system to address TB in children and pregnant women.
- Inclusion of children in trials on new diagnostics and drugs.

**Long term (2020)**
- Test for latent TB with ability to predict disease progression in children.
- Point of care test with good accuracy for childhood TB.
- Shorter, child-friendly regimens for both, infection and disease.
- Vaccines to prevent infection and disease in children and adults.

This roadmap is being developed by the World Health Organization and the Childhood TB Subgroup of the Stop TB Partnership. The document will be launched in November 2012. Please access www.who.int/tb/challenges/children for a related advocacy brochure. For more information please visit our websites: World Health Organization: www.who.int/tb; Stop TB Partnership: www.stoptb.org