

Time to act to prevent and control tuberculosis among inmates

A statement of the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease

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Background

More than 9.8 million people are detained in penitentiary services (commonly, but not limited to, jails, remand/detention centres and prisons) around the world.¹ Inmates are at greater risk of becoming infected with *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, and of developing tuberculosis (TB) disease, than people in the general population due to their close, prolonged indoor confinement and other associated conditions common among inmates.² The varying durations of incarceration pose challenges for quantifying the magnitude of the TB problem in the inmate population.³ The incidence of TB in prisons ranges from 5 to 70 times higher than within the general population.^{2,4,5} Concomitant conditions, particularly human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection, injecting drug use and poor nutritional status, put inmates at risk of infection and rapid progression from latent TB infection (LTBI) to TB disease. The specific circumstances of inmates and prison settings pose additional challenges for TB prevention and control in the prison and jail services and in communities at large.⁵

Considering that:

- 1 the health of prisoners and inmates is an integral part of the health of the wider community;
- 2 the diagnosis of TB and resistant forms of TB is not often readily available in penitentiary settings;⁶
- 3 and poor medical management of patients in penitentiary settings and/or inadequate follow-up of released prisoners with TB can undermine TB prevention and control efforts in society at large;

health authorities, national and international technical agencies, civil society organisations and donor agencies are urged to prioritise TB prevention and control in penitentiary settings and are strongly recommended to:

- i adapt and implement the internationally recommended Stop TB strategy in penitentiary settings;⁷
- ii conduct screening of new inmates, periodic screening of prisoners and penitentiary services staff to detect active TB in a timely manner, and ensure contact tracing;
- iii ensure airborne infection control, including protective measures for staff,⁸ and promote provider-initiated HIV testing and counselling to detect HIV and TB-HIV co-infected individuals to provide the necessary support and care;⁹
- iv provide access to early diagnosis and effective treatment of all types of TB, including drug-resistant TB and TB co-infection with HIV and/or other communicable diseases;
- v ensure early initiation of antiretroviral therapy for people living with HIV who have active TB;

- vi with the condition that the aforementioned elements of TB prevention and control are ensured, provide preventive therapy both for those individuals who become infected with TB in penitentiary services and for those found to be infected while in penitentiary services;
- vii ensure a continuum of care for released prisoners who are on treatment for TB infection or disease and for individuals who are on treatment for either infection or disease before entering the penitentiary services;
- viii monitor the TB and TB-HIV situation in the penitentiary services, include standard recording and reporting of TB, HIV and other communicable diseases in penitentiary populations and link recording and reporting in the penitentiary services to the national health information system;
- ix encourage and facilitate collaborative efforts between the penitentiary and civilian health services;
- x provide psychological counselling and support for prisoners to improve TB and HIV treatment adherence;
- xi strengthen TB control in penitentiary-based programmes by raising awareness about TB among prisoners and penitentiary medical and non-medical staff through continuing education;
- xii and promote operational research to build evidence for enhanced TB prevention, control and care in penitentiary services.

References

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Definitions

Inmate = an individual confined to an institution

Jail/remand/detention centre = a place for the confinement of persons in lawful detention, especially persons awaiting trial under local jurisdiction

Prison = a place for the confinement of persons in lawful detention, especially persons convicted of crimes