

THE theme for World Tuberculosis Day 2025, which is marked on March 24 annually, is “United to End Tuberculosis”, emphasising the importance of global collaboration to eradicate TB as a public health problem.

Although TB is preventable and treatable, the disease kills millions annually.

TB, an infectious disease caused by the bacterium *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, spreads through the air when an infected individual coughs, sneezes, or speaks.

The disease has several characteristics that need to be closely monitored to ensure accurate diagnosis and treatment.

First, TB symptoms are often non-specific and can be mistaken for common illnesses such as the flu or a regular cough.

The main symptoms include a persistent cough lasting more than two weeks, prolonged fever, night sweats, unexplained weight loss, and extreme fatigue.

A cough accompanied by blood or bloody sputum is a more serious sign and requires immediate attention.

Additionally, TB can also affect organs other than the lungs, such as the bones, joints, kidneys, and brain, which can cause different symptoms depending on the affected organ.

Treating TB requires a high level of commitment from the patient and continuous support from medical professionals.

Work together to fight TB



Photo: AFP

Psychological support and close health monitoring are also necessary to help patients through the long and challenging treatment period.

TB is often treated with a course of many antibiotics in a single medication combination taken for six to nine months.

Commonly-used antibiotics include isoniazid, rifampicin, pyrazinamide, and ethambutol.

It is essential for patients to take their medication consistently and according to the prescribed schedule to avoid drug resistance and ensure the effec-

tiveness of the treatment.

The Directly Observed Treatment, Short-Course (DOTS) approach – where medical professionals or trained volunteers watch and make sure patients take their medicine as directed – is often used to ensure patients take their medication as directed.

In cases of multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB), treatment may be longer and involve stronger medications with more severe side effects.

The complications of untreated or inadequately managed TB consist of lung damage, respira-

tory failure, pleurisy, spinal TB, meningitis, kidney or liver dysfunction, infertility, TB pericarditis, multiorgan failure, and death.

Even though TB is a curable disease, challenges remain, particularly delays in diagnosis, non-adherence to treatment regimes, and MDR-TB.

In Malaysia, TB cases have increased from 25,391 in 2022 to 26,781 in 2023. Reported new cases worldwide were 10.6 million in 2022, with 1.3 million deaths. These figures highlight the urgent need to increase awareness about TB to ensure prompt treatment can be initiated for those infected.

The goals of World Tuberculosis Day 2025 highlight several key aspects:

First, to raise awareness through treatment promotion, early diagnosis encouragement, and stigma reduction. Programmes for community education can help people identify symptoms and get help right away.

Second, to achieve universal healthcare by guaranteeing fair TB prevention and treatment, especially for marginalised populations. Reducing gaps in TB care and improving treatment results are possible when social determinants of health are addressed.

Investing in innovations is third. Ending TB requires the development of improved diagnostic instruments, vaccinations, and shortened treatment plans.

Technological innovations that promise to improve healthcare access and accuracy include using artificial intelligence in TB diagnosis.

Fourth, to pool resources and knowledge, cooperation with partnerships among governments, NGOs, and international institutions such as the World Health Organisation is crucial.

The WHO's End TB Strategy acts as a guide for accomplishing global TB eradication objectives.

We must work together to fight TB by educating our communities about how to prevent it, by taking part in local screening and awareness programmes, and by supporting organisations that are in the forefront of TB prevention and treatment initiatives.

In Malaysia, TB prevention promotes social justice, economic stability, and better health.

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