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**TB kills an Indian every minute**

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## TB kills an Indian every minute

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Even today, one Indian dies of tuberculosis every minute. Nearly 1,000 people in India die from it every day or two deaths in every three minutes, according to World Health Organisation estimates.

Over 14 million Indians suffer from this deadly infectious disease caused by mycobacteria tuberculosis. Worldwide, almost two million people die of TB each year while two billion people, or one third of the world's population, are infected with the disease which is growing faster in South East Asia. This bacterium usually attacks the lungs but may also lodge in the lymph glands from where the disease may spread to any part of the body including brain, intestines, kidneys or bones.

Considered worldwide a disease of the poor, it is no longer so. For it is as prevalent among the affluent urban population as in the poor rural sector. Over 40 per cent of the Indian population is infected with TB bacillus, about 20,000 get infected and 5,000 develop the disease every day, according to official data with the ministry of health and family welfare.

Though TB prevalence had been halved and mortality rate reduced by a third in South East Asia by the end of 2009, "India contributes 3.4 million or one fifth of the world TB cases," South-East Asia regional director of WHO, Mr Samlee Plianbangchang, said here on World Tuberculosis Day, yesterday.

TB is found to have far greater spread among smokers compared to non-smokers. India contributes to nearly 17 per cent of the world's smokers, a habit associated with TB, according to a study by Dr PC Gupta of the Healis Sekhsaria Institute of Public Health, Mumbai. Approximately, 32 per cent of tuberculosis deaths in India are due to beedi smoking, he said.

The study conducted in the 15-35 age group shows that smoking, including beedi smoking, may increase the risk of clinical disease and leads to an increased probability of death from tuberculosis.

"Contrary to the West, a large number of deaths in India among smokers is from tuberculosis and not from lung cancer and mortality rate due to beedi smoking far outweighs other forms of smoking. Most men in our country get infected with asymptomatic tuberculosis ~ that is smoking damages the lungs to such an extent that the latent infection cannot be sustained, eventually leading to death. Smoking increases the risk of infection from the TB causing bacteria, the risk of progression of the disease and the risk of death among TB patients," according to Dr Gupta.

When a person is infected with TB he/she either becomes sick immediately or the disease stays inactive, that is latent. One out of 10 people who have latent TB will develop the active disease, becoming sick and contagious, said experts. Latent TB, an inactive form of the infection, poses the biggest challenge in clinical treatment of tuberculosis for it goes undetected and untreated as the antibiotics used in TB management fail to tackle it. Millions of lives throughout the world can be saved if we can figure out a way to treat TB when it's in a latent stage, according to Dr Nick West, associate faculty of mycobacterial diseases, Sydney. Dr West and his team are looking at the genetics of TB in the hope that they would reveal a way to reduce the impact of the deadly disease.