

# Older people and those with HIV are more vulnerable to tuberculosis

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Older people and those with HIV are more vulnerable to tuberculosis. Credit: SINC

A study by the Barcelona Public Health Agency has revealed those sections of the population that are most vulnerable to tuberculosis. The research, published in the journal *Respiratory Research*, shows that the highest death rates from this disease are among those aged over 50 or infected with HIV.

"Some patients give up their [tuberculosis](#) treatment (which lasts for a minimum of six months), resulting in a danger of them infecting other people, worsening their own state of health or even dying", Joan A. Caylà, lead author of the study and a researcher at the Barcelona Public Health Agency (ASPB), tells SINC.

The study, published in the journal *Respiratory Research*, identifies the factors linked to people giving up tuberculosis treatment and deaths from the disease. Researchers from the Spanish Society of Pneumology and Thoracic Surgery (SEPAR) analysed a sample of 1,490 people with the illness in Spain between 2006 and 2007.

The results of these studies show that abandoning tuberculosis treatment is usually related to having undergone previous treatment for the disease, being an injecting drug user (IDU), living with a large number of people, and also the doctor's perception that the patient does not have a good understanding of the treatment.

The authors from the ASPB, meanwhile, stress that deaths are associated with failure to understand the treatment, being an IDU, being in directly-observed treatment (DOT), and also being over the age of 50 or being infected with HIV.

## **One-third of the world population**

The World Health Organisation (WHO) declared 24 March as World Tuberculosis Day, to commemorate the day in 1882 when the biomedic Robert Koch announced the discovery of the bacillus that causes the disease. This was the first step towards being able to diagnose and cure it.

Each year, eight million people contract tuberculosis worldwide, and two million die from it. Although tuberculosis is still endemic in Spain and other wealthy countries, there has been a resurgence of tuberculosis infections in some rural areas, and with the increase in HIV and failure to control the disease.

The WHO aims for the tuberculosis prevalence and death rates to have fallen to half their current levels by 2015. Today, around two billion

people - one-third of the entire world population - are infected with tuberculosis.

**More information:** Caylà JA, Rodrigo T, Ruiz-Manzano J, Caminero JA, Vidal R, García JM, Blanquer R, Casals M and the Working Group on Completion of Tuberculosis Treatment in Spain (Study ECUTTE). "Tuberculosis treatment adherence and fatality in Spain". Respiratory Research, 10:121, Dec 2009. [respiratory-research.com/content/10/1/121](http://respiratory-research.com/content/10/1/121).pdf

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