

Taiwan scientist unveils rapid, low-cost TB test kit

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A Taiwan scientist on Sunday unveiled what he said is the first low-cost and efficient test kit for identifying tuberculosis bacteria, killer of more than 1.5 million people worldwide every year.

The kit, which looks like those used for pregnancy tests, can establish whether samples taken from a suspected TB patient are positive or not in less than five minutes, the inventor said, following a seminar in Taipei held to mark World [Tuberculosis](#) Day.

"If used with the help of professionals, the accuracy of the test kit is around 98 percent," Professor Lai Hsin-chih, head of the Department of Medical Biotechnology and Laboratory Science at Taiwan's Chang Gung University, told AFP.

He put the accuracy of existing kits at around 50-60 percent, claiming that his is more accurate because it tests against "the unique nucleic acid of TB" rather than [antibodies](#) like existing tests.

"That's why our test kit is much more sensitive and accurate," he said.

Currently it takes eight weeks for hospital laboratories to obtain the results of patients' tests for the highly infectious disease.

"Compared with the traditional ways of testing TB patients, our test kit is much cheaper," Lai said.

"This is important as a great majority of TB patients are poor...hopefully the test kit would be a special help to them," he said, adding that the production cost of the kit is less than 50 Taiwan dollars (1.50 US).

Lai said he already has patent rights for the kit in Taiwan and has sought rights with the US authorities too.

Some 1.6 million people died of TB in 2006 according to statistics provided by the World Health Organisation. The disease claims about 800 lives in Taiwan each year.

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