

South Africa to test all HIV patients for TB

October 13 2010, By JENNY GROSS , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- Health officials in South Africa said Wednesday they recommend screening all HIV patients for tuberculosis and want automatic TB tests for HIV patients to become normal procedure within five years.

UNAIDS official Paul De Lay said that by 2015, all TB patients in South Africa should be automatically screened for HIV. Officials gathered in Johannesburg on Wednesday appealed for international donations to help them develop a new drug regimen to treat TB patients who have developed [drug resistance](#). They said they are also testing four vaccines that they hope to released by 2015.

HIV patients are much more likely to contract [tuberculosis](#) because of weakened immune systems. South Africa has one of the world's highest TB rates because of its AIDS epidemic. South Africa has more people living with HIV than anywhere else in the world.

"There's a terrible link between HIV and TB," De Lay said. "The epidemic here is much more severe than it would've been because of the HIV epidemic."

De Lay said the new screening procedure could sooner identify TB in HIV-positive patients, but warned that linking TB to HIV could make people reluctant to voluntarily seek TB treatment because of the social stigma against [HIV](#).

The [World Health Organization](#) is also finalizing a test that diagnoses TB

within hours instead of months, said Mario Raviglione, a WHO official. The test would reveal whether someone has the disease and if it is a drug-resistant strain, he said.

He said this would "revolutionize" TB care, particularly in countries like South Africa where many people spread the lung disease before they are diagnosed and treated and where many patients don't return for follow-up doctor visits to get test results.

The global incidence of TB has been in decline since 2004, but the rate of decline is too slow, Raviglione said. Ten million people will lose their lives in the next five years if international donors do not step up funding, according to the Stop TB Partnership, an umbrella group created to bring together different organizations in the fight against the disease.

The WHO reported last year that South Africa had nearly 460,000 new TB cases in 2007.

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