

New study finds levels of TB in Irish travellers three times that of white Irish-born population

March 12 2015, by Yolanda Kennedy

A recent study by researchers from the School of Medicine in Trinity College Dublin in conjunction with the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) and the Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre has found a 3-fold higher rate of Tuberculosis (TB) in Irish Travellers than in the white Irish born population. The findings were recently published in the international journal *Epidemiology & Infection* (Cambridge University Press).

The researchers examined for the first time the incidence of [tuberculosis](#) (TB) in Irish Travellers in Ireland over a 12 year period from 2002 to 2013. The research found a crude incidence rate (the number of new cases in a year) for TB in Irish Travellers that was approximately 3 times higher than in the white Irish-born population.

The research team also found that in Irish Travellers the average age of a TB patient was 26 years compared to 43 years in the general population in Ireland, and 49 years in the white Irish-born population.

Speaking about the significance of this research in relation to Irish Traveller health status, lead author Dr Ronan O'Toole, Adjunct Assistant Professor in Clinical Microbiology, School of Medicine, Trinity and Senior Lecturer in Microbiology, Breathe Well NHMRC Centre, School of Medicine, University of Tasmania said: "The findings of this study underline a continuation in disparities in health outcomes for Irish

Travellers compared to the general population. Another study from 2014, found a higher incidence rate of invasive meningococcal disease in Irish Travellers. The All Ireland Traveller Health Study published in 2010 determined that infant mortality rates are approximately 3.5 times higher, and that life expectancy at birth is more than 10 years lower in Irish Travellers compared to the national average."

Dr O'Toole continued: "Further research into the specific risk factors that impact on the incidence of TB and other communicable illnesses in Irish Travellers is now needed. Routine recording of Irish Traveller ethnicity for notifiable illnesses will aid the identification of inequities in incidence rates as well as their respective determinants. This may provide guidance for the appropriate orientation of preventive healthcare services to reduce communicable illness morbidity and mortality in the Irish Traveller population."

Nurul Amin from the Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre said: "This study highlights the need for routine ethnicity data collection but also another aspect of the ongoing Traveller health challenges. There is an urgent need to address the broader social determinants of [health](#) with regard to the inequalities in education, employment and accommodation experienced by Travellers. Pavee Point looks forward to working with the HPSC in rolling out the ethnic identifier project as part of its collaborative work with the Health Service Executive.

Tuberculosis (TB) is the leading cause of mortality due to respiratory infection worldwide, killing more than 1.5 million people each year.

The [researchers](#) looked at TB notification data from the National TB Surveillance System and the Computerised Infectious Disease Reporting (CIDR) system managed by the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC).

More information: "Tuberculosis incidence in the Irish Traveller population in Ireland from 2002 to 2013." *Epidemiology and Infection*
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Provided by Trinity College Dublin

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