

# India pledges to eradicate TB, leprosy within decade

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India Wednesday set deadlines to eradicate a range of deadly diseases that afflict tens of millions of its poorest people, unveiling a major boost to health spending in the annual budget.

The government announced a 23 percent increase in spending on its woefully underfunded public health system, including a pledge to eliminate killers like tuberculosis, leprosy and black fever.

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said cash will flow particularly to poorer rural areas, where healthcare services are few and preventable illnesses are rife.

"Poverty is usually associated with poor health. It is the poor who suffer the maximum from chronic diseases," Jaitley told parliament as he presented the budget.

He said black fever and filariasis, both potentially fatal mosquito-born illnesses, would be stamped out by 2017, with leprosy following a year later.

The target for measles eradication is 2020 and 2025 for tuberculosis—a major killer with millions of new cases every year.

Jaitley also outlined ambitious goals for reducing maternal and infant mortality, which is nearly double in rural areas compared to urban centres.

Additional funding in the budget will also be used to transform 150,000 tiny rural clinics into properly-staffed treatment centres.

India, home to one-seventh of the world's population, spends just over one percent of its [gross domestic product](#) on its healthcare system, far below the global average.

It is not the first time the government has pledged to eradicate diseases, rolling out mass vaccination programs and awareness campaigns.

India did stamp out the polio virus in 2014 but millions still suffer from infectious diseases and preventable illness, with poor sanitation and lack of treatment options exacerbating the problem.

There were 2.5 million cases of TB reported in 2015, according to the World Health Organisation. An estimated 200,000 patients die every year from the infection.

India reported another 200,000 cases of leprosy in 2015 despite an eradication programme being in place since 1955.

Among the biggest threats are vector-borne diseases, with an estimated 265 million people at risk of contracting [black fever](#)—or Kala-Azar—and filariasis.

Both are spread by mosquitos and infection can be fatal, with more than 20,000 deaths across India every year.

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