

TB cases declined in U.S. during pandemic

March 25 2022



Reported cases of tuberculosis (TB) dropped significantly across the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic, but delayed or missed diagnoses may have contributed to the decline.

"Delayed or missed tuberculosis disease diagnoses are threatening the health of people with TB disease and the communities where they live," said Dr. Philip LoBue, director of the division of tuberculosis elimination at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"A delayed or missed TB diagnosis leads to TB disease progression and can result in hospitalization or death—and the risk of transmitting TB to others," LoBue explained in a CDC news release.

According to [preliminary data](#) published March 24 by the CDC, reported TB cases plunged 20% in 2020 and stayed 13% lower in 2021 than before the pandemic. Pre-pandemic, TB cases typically fell between 1% and 2% a year, the CDC said.

The [report](#) offered several possible reasons for the larger declines in 2020 and 2021.

For one, COVID-19 prevention measures such as mask use and social distancing may have helped reduce the spread of [TB](#).

And widespread disruptions to health care during the pandemic may have delayed TB diagnoses. The pandemic also put significant strain on [public health services](#), including TB prevention and control services.

In addition, similarities in COVID-19 and TB symptoms may have resulted in missed TB diagnoses.

[TB](#) is caused by a bacteria that usually attacks [the lung](#), but TB germs can attack any part of the body, including the kidney, spine or brain, according to the CDC.

Case reports show that some people eventually diagnosed with TB were evaluated for COVID-19—but not tested for TB—during multiple health

care visits. As a result, some TB may have been missed or gone undiagnosed until it was more advanced.

"The nation must ensure that [health care](#) providers understand how to diagnose and distinguish TB disease from potential cases of COVID-19," LoBue said.

The CDC recently launched a campaign called "[Think. Test. Treat TB.](#)" It aims to raise awareness about the disease and the importance of prevention.

Talking with your doctor is the first step to protecting your family, friends and community from TB, the CDC said.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has a [campaign to fight tuberculosis](#).

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Citation: TB cases declined in U.S. during pandemic (2022, March 25) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-03-tb-cases-declined-pandemic.html>

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