

Tuberculosis still a major international killer

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Tuberculosis: Many Australians believe it was eradicated years ago – but the grim reality is that TB is still a major world-wide killer, responsible for 1.5 million deaths a year.

Today is [World Tuberculosis Day](#), but every day is TB day for University of Queensland researcher Dr Nick West, as he battles to combat a disease that kills someone every 21 seconds.

"A lot of people think TB was only a problem when their grandparents were young but, sadly, that couldn't be further from the truth," Dr West said.

"Despite a concerted international effort, there were 9.6 million new cases of TB in 2014, resulting in 1.5 million deaths. And one in three people globally is infected with TB.

Dr West, the founder and Laboratory Head of the Tuberculosis Research Laboratory in UQ's School of Chemistry and Molecular Biosciences, said TB, caused by the bacteria *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, was highly contagious and could be spread from person to person simply by breathing.

"When a person sick with TB coughs or sneezes, little droplets containing the bacteria can float through the air, allowing them to be easily inhaled by others," Dr West said.

He said intensified research efforts have resulted in new vaccine

strategies, new candidate antibiotics and rapid diagnostics that suggest that one of the oldest human infections could be beaten.

"Any successful anti-TB strategy has three pillars – prevention, diagnosis and treatment," Dr West said.

"My team and I are contributing to all three areas, using modern genomic technologies to gain a better understanding of how bacteria actually cause TB.

"In the past few years we've made huge progress in this area.

"We're now in the process of translating our discoveries into practical solutions such as new therapies and control measures."

The Tuberculosis Research Laboratory at UQ, established in 2012, is the only facility in the country dedicated solely to the microbiology of TB.

World Tuberculosis Day marks the 1882 announcement of Dr Robert Koch's discovery of Mycobacterium [tuberculosis](#).

Provided by University of Queensland

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