Eradicating HIV Will Take Collaborative Action and a Commitment to Curb TB Infections

The Forum of International Respiratory Societies Highlights World AIDS Day.

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The COVID-19 pandemic hampered progress in fighting tuberculosis infections worldwide. Diverted funds meant that one of the world’s leading infectious killers caused 1.3 million deaths in 2022. TB is also the leading cause of death among those with HIV/AIDS worldwide. In 2022, 167,000 people died of HIV-associated TB.

This World AIDS Day, the Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS), of which Pan African Thoracic Society (PATS) is a founding member, calls on governments, health advocates, and non-government organizations to strengthen their response to AIDS and TB. This collaborative effort is necessary to help realize the World Health Organization’s goal of ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030.

“People with latent TB who are living with HIV should have access to TB prevention therapy,” said American Thoracic Society (ATS) President M. Patricia Rivera, MD, ATSF. “Studies show that this therapy can reduce the chances of dying from TB and AIDS by nearly 40 percent.”

ATS began in 1905 as the National Association for the Study and Prevention of Tuberculosis. Today, the ATS and other FIRS members, representing the world’s leading respiratory societies, are working to improve lung health globally.

In the developing world, TB is often the first sign a person has HIV. Yet, about half of the people living with HIV and tuberculosis are unaware of their co-infection and, therefore, not receiving appropriate care that could prevent not only serious illness but death, according to WHO.

Shortly after AIDS emerged, it fueled a global resurgence of TB that continues in many low- and middle-income countries. In 2022, the WHO reported that the largest number of new TB cases were in WHO’s Southeast Asia Region (46
percent), followed by the African Region (23 percent) and the Western Pacific (18 percent). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, HIV infection is the greatest risk factor for progressing from latent to active TB.

HIV increases the risk of other infectious respiratory diseases, including *Pneumocystis jirovecii* pneumonia and bacterial pneumonia, both of which can be life threatening. There is also an increased risk of non-infectious lung complications.

Education, prevention strategies, and new medicines, particularly antiretroviral therapies, have reduced the number of AIDS-related deaths by 69 percent since the peak in 2004.

Still, the WHO estimates that in 2022, an estimated 39 million people were living with AIDS, 1.5 million of them children.

FIRS believes a global response to HIV/AIDS can be strengthened by:

- Increasing awareness of the continuing global threat of HIV-related disease and its link to TB and other respiratory diseases.
- Improving the health outcomes of people living with HIV through patient care and research into better prevention, early diagnosis, and effective treatment strategies for both HIV and TB, including rapid diagnosis and treatment for multidrug-resistant TB that is harder to cure.
- Reducing the incidence and severity of HIV-related disease by strengthening mother-to-child transmission prevention programs and increasing the early use of antiretroviral therapy.
- Improving HIV education in at-risk communities to reduce the incidence of new HIV infections.
- Reducing HIV-related health disparities and inequities.

“The good news is that antiretroviral therapies work, and TB is preventable and curable,” Dr. Rivera said. “These two facts, along with the millions of lives that we can save, should be motivation enough to ensure that these medical advances are available to everyone.”

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About the Forum of International Respiratory Societies

The Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS) is an organization comprised of the world’s leading international respiratory societies working together to improve lung health globally. The goal of FIRS is to unify and enhance efforts to improve lung health through the combined work of its more than 70,000 members globally.

FIRS comprises the American College of Chest Physicians (CHEST), American Thoracic Society (ATS), the Asian Pacific Society of Respirology (APSR), Asociación Latino Americana De Tórax (ALAT), European Respiratory Society (ERS), International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Diseases (The Union), Pan African Thoracic Society (PATS), the Global Initiative for Asthma (GINA), and the Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease (GOLD).

The Global Impact of Respiratory Disease report outlines major causes of respiratory disease and lays out recommendations for global action.