Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference
and Catholic Relief Services - South Africa

Practical, low-cost interventions can reduce the spread of TB infection

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Summary

Tuberculosis (TB) is responsible for high mortality rates in children globally.

Children in crowded areas are more vulnerable to contract airborne diseases such as TB.

TB infection control measures are essential to protect children against contracting TB.

TB infection control measures can be implemented in different settings and can be practical and low-cost.

Introduction

Active TB is prevalent among people attending HIV projects. The crowded setting and poor ventilation increases the risk of TB transmission. Structures that house Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) programs were not necessarily designed for healthcare provision; many are based in converted freight containers, temporary buildings and old church buildings. Children accompanying parents and guardians to HIV projects are likely to be exposed to TB. OVC are highly susceptible to TB, particularly when they are malnourished or HIV exposed. Simple measures to prevent and control TB transmission are needed at places where children gather such as early childhood development, drop-in and OVC centers.

The SACBC, with support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Catholic Relief Services (CRS), implemented TB infection control measures in church-based HIV projects to reduce the risk of TB transmission to those using these facilities.

TB infection control was implemented in four steps:

1: Site-specific TB training and infection control plan

2: Technical review of infection control plans

3: Improve ventilation

4: Continuous on-site monitoring

Results

- TB infection control measures were effectively implemented in rural facilities.
- Monitoring after implementation proved essential to sustainability.

Above: Outside waiting / play areas oppose to crowded buildings
Below: Whirly birds improve ventilation inside poorly ventilated structures

Top tips

- ✓ Teach children cough etiquette
- ✓ Identify, separate and fast-track coughing persons
- ✓ Ownership is the key to success
- ✓ Establish an infection control committee
- ✓ Assign a person responsible for infection control

Conclusions

In high HIV and TB prevalence countries, OVC programs should consider replicating this experience in settings where children gather. These simple measures will reduce the risk of TB transmission and are applicable to settings other than healthcare facilities.

Screening of children following a simple questionnaire will facilitate referrals to clinics, early diagnosis and treatment and reduce the risk of transmission within the pre-school setting.

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