

# My view: Tuberculosis still a threat today

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For the Deseret News

Published: July 18, 2016 12:00 a.m.

In 1965 as a young student nurse, I worked in a tuberculosis unit in a county hospital in New York City and I contracted a TB infection that has not developed into disease. This means TB bacterium lies dormant inside my body, ready to become active should I have any major alteration in my health.

One third of the world's population carries the bacteria, according to the CDC, and 35 percent of these individuals have other medical conditions such as diabetes mellitus, end stage renal disease, HIV or another immunosuppressive condition that can increase their risk of developing TB disease. In Africa and Asia, people with HIV contract and die from tuberculosis because their weakened immune systems are unable to fight off TB. Tuberculosis is the world's oldest and most lethal disease. It even is prevalent in Utah, where 37 new cases were diagnosed in 2015.

This doesn't have to be so. Since 2004, countries that receive investments from the Global Fund to Fight HIV, TB and Malaria have seen a 29 percent decrease in the death rate from TB, proving that TB can be managed and in many cases contained.

The Global Fund is a 21st century public-private partnership among governments, civil society, the private sector and people affected by AIDS, TB and malaria. The Global Fund does not administer programs, it provides grants to individuals, organizations and government agencies in countries that submit qualified proposals. In this way the Global Fund develops local capacity and infrastructure. Presently, 125 countries are participating with the Global Fund in TB treatment and elimination projects.

The Global Fund operates with a high degree of transparency in all of its work, and every dollar it spends can be tracked on its website. Plus, its oversight ensures a minimum of waste and corruption because programs must demonstrate effectiveness, stay within their projected budgets and stand up to rigorous audits or lose their funding.

Worldwide, 24,000 people are diagnosed with TB every day, amounting to 9 million people each year. Over 4,000 people die from TB each day, totaling at least 1.5 million deaths per year. Many people, especially in developing countries, have drug resistant forms, making their disease more difficult to treat. In the U.S., 9,565 people were diagnosed with it in 2015, the first increase in 23 years. Tuberculosis is transmitted through the air in tiny droplets when a person with disease sneezes, coughs, laughs or sings. Despite the staggering loss of life and illness that TB causes, only one new drug to treat it was brought to market during the past 20 years.

Of Utah's 37 new cases last year, 64 percent were in the Salt Lake City area. Over the last five years, eight cases involved children under the age of 5, according to the Utah Department of Health. TB's global trends affect us at home and should not be ignored.

The United States is a leader in supporting the Global Fund, and that should continue when donor nations meet Sept. 16 in Canada for a replenishment conference. The U.S. should honor its commitment to provide up to one-third of the \$13 billion the Global Fund needs for the next three years, and it should strongly encourage partner nations to support the fund as well.

I live with the TB bacterium lying dormant in my body, representing millions of people around the world, and I support the U.S. providing additional funding for the Global Fund to continue its lifesaving work. Please urge your congressional representatives, senators and President Obama to support additional financing for the Global Fund before the September meeting in Canada.

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*Gail Dolson is a nurse practitioner and a member of RESULTS — a citizen activist/advocacy group committed to the eradication of poverty in the U.S. and globally.*

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