

900,000 new cases of TB a year

Despite a downward trend of tuberculosis cases in recent years, China reports roughly 900,000 new cases annually, keeping it among the 30 countries with the highest incidence of the infectious disease, according to the National Health and Family Planning Commission.

By the end of 2016, the TB incidence rate stood at 61 per 100,000 people in China, down 14 percent since 2011, the latest statistics from the commission's disease prevention and control bureau showed. The commission is the nation's top health authority.

The bacterial infection was not evenly distributed across the country. Rural areas in the western regions recorded the highest TB prevalence, according to an e-mail from the commission on the eve of World TB Day on Thursday.

The Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region reported the highest TB prevalence, at 184.5 people out of 100,000 in 2015, and the Tibet autonomous region and Guizhou province followed.

The commission has taken in the past several years a number of steps alleviating the TB burden in these areas, including increasing investment for health projects, improving training for local medical staff and encouraging local governments to issue favorable policies for TB patients, such as increasing medical insurance reimbursement for the disease, the commission said.

Health authorities will continue to support areas with higher reported cases of TB, it said.

China also plans to intensify research in the prevention and control of TB in the next few years, the commission said.

A focus will be on research in preventive and curable vaccines for the disease, it said. Authorities also will encourage research into new therapies and drugs for TB, including chemotherapies and immunotherapies, it said.

On Thursday, China's first lady Peng Liyuan visited a middle school in Tianjin to promote TB prevention and treatment awareness among students.

Peng, a World Health Organization goodwill ambassador for tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS, attended a class meeting with the theme of fighting TB and visited an exhibition of creative works made by students to promote prevention.

Incidence of tuberculosis in China is expected to be reduced to below 58 for every 100,000 people by 2020, according to a national plan on the control and prevention of TB released by the State Council in February.

According to the document, services for preventing and treating tuberculosis should be further improved by 2020 and those who have the disease should be diagnose dearly and given access to regular treatment.

“China faces many challenges in the prevention and control of tuberculosis, in particular the big number of patients and the number of patients that have developed drug resistance,” said Wang Xiexiu, former president of the Chinese Antituberculosis Association.

There are few new drugs for TB, and those commonly used have lost their effect in many patients due to drug resistance, she said. The WHO estimated that in 2015 China had 57,000 cases of multidrug resistant TB.