



## URC SUPPORTS DEVELOPMENT OF PEDIATRIC TB GUIDELINES IN GEORGIA

The urgency of the childhood TB problem and the need for attention, prioritization and commitment cannot be overestimated. Each year, half a million children contract tuberculosis (TB) worldwide, and of these children, nearly 70,000 die from this preventable and curable disease. Infants and young children are far more likely than adults to experience more severe forms of TB, including TB meningitis or miliary TB, which are associated with higher mortality rates than pulmonary TB and have to struggle with treatment that is not child friendly. TB preys on the most vulnerable children—the poor, the malnourished, those living with HIV—and it causes an almost unimaginable burden to children and their families. Children with TB fall behind in their education and are heavily stigmatized, harming their ability to be successful in the future.

TB illness in children is often missed or overlooked due to non-specific symptoms and difficulties in diagnosis leading to the lack of data about the scale and the scope—the major problems in addressing the issue. In 2011 alone, there were 202 registered TB cases in children under the age of 15, which comprises 3.6% of all TB cases in Georgia. This number likely underestimates the rate of infection in children, however, as most data suggest children represent 6-10% of the total number of all TB cases. According to World Health Organization data, it is likely that at least 10% of all MDR TB cases also occur in children under the age of 15. Given that the burden of MDR TB in Georgia is among the highest in the world, it is likely that Georgian children represent a disproportionately high rate of MDR TB as well.

Considering the unique nature of childhood TB, its proper diagnosis, treatment, and prevention require specific approaches and resources. WHO has issued guidance on treating children specifically, however, the Georgia national TB guidelines and protocols did not address children separately. This omission represented a critical gap in the national TB response. To correct this oversight, the USAID-

funded Tuberculosis Prevention Project, implemented by the University Research Co., LLC, supported the Georgia National TB Program (NTP) and Ministry of Labor, Health, and Social Affairs (MOLHSA) to develop evidence-based, child and parent-centered pediatric TB care guidelines and protocols.



A young TB patient participates in World TB Day activities geared toward raising awareness that pediatric TB can be cured.

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Pediatric TB patients participate in a painting activity with TPP staff to increase awareness of TB in Georgia.

The guideline development process was participatory and involved a variety of senior healthcare professionals including TB specialists, pediatricians, family medicine practitioners, and nurses. The scope of the guideline is comprehensive and addresses areas such as diagnosis, treatment, management of side effects, and contact tracing for regular and MDR TB among children. Special attention was paid to the patient's version of the guideline that provides parents and older children with understandable information on diagnostic and treatment options. It aims to enable them to make informed decisions based on the best available evidence, to support the trusting relationship between patients and their physicians, and to improve adherence and outcomes.

The guideline and protocols have been approved by the National Guideline Accreditation Board at MOLHSA and will serve as an effective tool to enhance early and accurate case identification and treatment as well as contact screening and management.



Dr. Jennifer Furin leads a training session for local trainers on the new pediatric TB guidelines.

The guideline also establishes explicit standards that provide a good benchmark for assessing the quality of care. Standards will serve as a reference point for assessing provider or system performance. By identifying the current and expected levels of quality, compliance, or adherence with such standards, these factors can be measured easily. To support the guideline implementation through training of senior TB and pediatrics experts TPP organized a comprehensive three day training of trainers course led by international expert Dr. Jennifer Furin. 26 TB specialists and pediatricians from all over the country attended the training. Trained local experts will disseminate the evidence-based information included in the guideline further to local physicians and nurses through additional training sessions and workshops. These steps are in line with key short and medium term actions recommended by WHO to combat childhood TB: capacity building of health workers scaled up at all levels to detect and manage children with TB and improved prevention, detection, diagnosis and management of TB in children.