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Headline: [WATCH] How to keep teenagers on TB treatment

Blurb: TB was the leading cause of death for teenagers between 2008 and 2018 in South Africa. Find out why and what we can do to make treatment more accessible to them in this short video.

Bullets:

- TB was the leading cause of death for teenagers between 2008 and 2018 in South Africa.
- When children hit puberty, they're more likely to fall sick with TB because their immune systems are changing. Plus, their budding social lives and the time they spend in classrooms mean they have more chances to spread the germ to each other.
- Research shows that clinics should try to adapt to be more accommodating to teens by, for instance, not scheduling appointments during school holidays, exam periods or after school.
- Watch this short video and find out what else clinics can do to keep teens on their TB treatment.

Joan van Dyk, Dylan Bush

Puberty makes teens (aged 10 to 19) more likely to become ill with tuberculosis if they're infected with the TB germ.

Why?

1. Teens start to lose the protection of their childhood immune system, which is good at controlling infection.
2. Adolescents spend a large portion of their time in classrooms, where the risk of getting infected with TB can be as high as in clinics.
3. TB spreads through the air. Teens' budding social lives mean they have more chances to pass the germ onto their peers.

Do teens take their TB pills correctly?

The way South Africa's health system is set up isn't working for adolescents.

They're not kids anymore, but they're not adults yet. So they often fall through the cracks.

Adolescents are more likely than adults (25 and up) to stop taking their TB pills before the end of their drug course.

TB treatment can be tough to take.

For teens of 16 years and younger, drug courses are between four and six months, depending on how bad their TB is.

Research shows the likelihood of teens not taking their treatment can even increase as they grow into young adults.

That's why many adolescents still die of TB.

TB was the leading cause of death for teenagers between 2008 and 2018 in SA.

How can we make clinics more teen-friendly?

Adolescents have specific preferences when it comes to TB treatment.

Researchers say clinics must make an effort to accommodate them.

A teen-friendly clinic could look like this:

1. Short appointments during school time.
2. No appointments during school holidays, exam periods or after school.
3. Flexible appointment times to accommodate teenagers who live between multiple households.
4. Fast-lane pickup lines at clinics where teens can collect their treatment, so long queues don't make them miss too much school.
5. Health workers could help school kids with TB share their experiences with other learners to reduce the stigma around the disease.
6. Doctors have found that setting up WhatsApp support groups for teens or matching them up with treatment buddies can help to keep them on treatment.

Sources:

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