

Virulent new strain of TB in South Africa

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A new drug-resistant strain of tuberculosis that appears to be almost untreatable has been found in South Africa.

The World Health Organization reports that the extremely drug resistant (XDR) form of the TB bacteria has been found in 53 people in KwaZulu-Natal. Fifty-two died within 16 days of diagnosis, the U.N. Integrated Regional Information Network reported.

All the patients were infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

"TB has always been a problem, but the development of XDR is unbelievably bad news for southern Africa with its heavy HIV and TB burden," said Dr. Francois Venter, of the Southern Africa HIV Clinicians Society.

South Africa has one of the highest rates of AIDS infection in the world. About half the population is believed to carry some form of the TB bacteria, although in many the disease is latent.

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