

WHO Challenges Russia on TB

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First lady Svetlana Medvedeva visiting the Kulakov center on the sidelines of a WHO conference on Tuesday. **Dmitry Astakhov**

The World Health Organization has challenged Russia to compete with neighboring countries for the best national plan to fight drug-resistant tuberculosis — and offered money to boot.

Russia has the third-highest rate of tuberculosis of all countries in Europe and the former Soviet Union, after Moldova and Romania, according to the latest data compiled by the WHO.

The WHO action plan urges European and CIS countries to draft national programs to adopt quicker and more expensive methods of tuberculosis detection that can reduce the time between a medical exam and the results from two months to two hours, Zsuzsanna Jakab, the WHO's regional director for Europe, said at a conference of state health officials and nongovernmental activists from Europe and the CIS.

The action plan also calls for universal access to the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of drug-resistant tuberculosis by 2015 and tailored services for specific segments of the

population, including migrants, drug users and prisoners, according to a WHO booklet distributed at the conference Monday.

Implementation of the plan will cost an estimated \$5 billion for the whole of Europe and the CIS, but will save about \$12 billion for member states in the WHO European region, which includes Europe and the CIS, the booklet said.

Countries with the best programs will be eligible for financing from the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the European Commission and other international agencies, the booklet said.

The plan is expected to help avert 263,000 cases of drug-resistant tuberculosis in the region and treat another 127,000 cases successfully, it said.

More than 128,000 new cases of tuberculosis and microscopy-confirmed tuberculosis relapses were registered in Russia, or 90.7 cases per 100,000 people, compared with 102.4 cases in Moldova and 101.7 in Romania in 2008, the latest year for which data are available.

A total of 63.1 new tuberculosis cases were registered in Lithuania that year, but all other European countries had less than eight new tuberculosis cases per 100,000 people that year.

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