Tuberculosis: Illegal Immigrants and Deadly Spread

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Introduction

- Tuberculosis (TB) is a bacterial disease caused by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*.
- Common symptoms include coughing, chest pain, fatigue, or hemoptysis.
- In its active form, tuberculosis is highly contagious.
- Untreated, tuberculosis usually leads to death.
- The majority of tuberculosis patients in the United States are immigrants.

Sources


Research Findings

- Approximately 71.5% of the tuberculosis cases in 2020 were immigrants.
- Undocumented immigrants are not screened for TB before arriving.
- Immigrants avoid tuberculosis treatment because of cultural stigmas, language barrier, and difficulty identifying symptoms.
- Undocumented immigrants avoid getting tuberculosis treatment because they fear deportation.
- California legislators proposed the “Illegal Immigrant Statute,” also known as Proposition 187, in 1994.
- Prop 187 denied healthcare to illegal immigrants and required doctors to report suspected illegal immigrants to the immigration authorities.
- Prop 187 did allow treatment for emergency cases, but waiting to treat TB until it progresses to the emergency stage allows it to spread to more people.
- Prop 187 passed into law on November 9, but a judge struck it down as unconstitutional in 1998.

Conclusions

- Several factors contribute to the likelihood that immigrants will spread tuberculosis.
- Fear of deportation is one of the largest issues.
- Anti-immigration laws such as California’s Proposition 187 exacerbate the problem.
- Immigrants who fear deportation will be even less likely to seek treatment, and therefore will spread TB to those around them.
- While the anti-immigrant provisions of Prop 187 were nullified, the former law continues to have an impact.
- Anti-immigration laws like Prop 187 that deny healthcare treatment ultimately cause more problems in terms of tuberculosis spread than they solve.