

South Africa's Youth Dying from TB and HIV

✖ Just this week we learned that Tuberculosis (TB) was the leading cause of death among South African youth in 2013. Released on Monday, *The Morbidity and Mortality Patterns Among the Youth of South Africa Report* found that natural causes account for 70% of youth mortality, with TB and HIV topping the list of communicable diseases resulting in death. According to the report, TB was the leading cause of death among youth in seven provinces, except for the Western and Northern Capes, where deaths because of HIV surpassed TB.

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The South African youth population (14-35 years) was estimated to be about 37% of the total population in 2010 and has been growing at a faster rate than the national annual growth rate. According to the report, South Africa is in the middle an HIV/AIDS epidemic of profound proportions in which young people will continue to fuel the epidemic. The overall HIV prevalence among youth ages 15-24 was 7.1% in 2012, with the black youth showing a prevalence rate 7.6 times higher than coloured. Because HIV and TB are so closely connected, they are often considered to be co-epidemics. Because of their compromised immune systems, people with HIV are much more likely to contract TB and in developing countries the first sign of AIDS in many HIV positive individuals is the contraction of TB.

The report points out that South African youth are faced with many challenges related to their well being such as poverty, housing, clean water and sanitation, healthy environments and food security. Clearly, while some improvement has been made

there is still much work to be done to restore health to the youth of South Africa and stop the co-epidemics of TB and HIV in their tracks.