20 March 2019, GENEVA—The World Health Organization has issued new guidance to improve treatment of multidrug resistant TB (MDR-TB). WHO is recommending shifting to fully oral regimens to treat people with MDR-TB. This new treatment course is more effective and is less likely to provoke adverse side effects. WHO recommends backing up treatment with active monitoring of drug safety and providing counselling support to help patients complete their course of treatment.

The recommendations are part of a larger package of actions designed to help countries increase the pace of progress to end tuberculosis (TB) and released in advance of World TB Day.

“The theme of this year’s World TB Day is: It’s time to end TB,” said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General. “We’re highlighting the urgent need to translate commitments made at the 2018 UN High Level Meeting on TB into actions that ensure everyone who needs TB care can get it.”

Since 2000, 54 million lives have been saved, and TB deaths fell by one-third. ÂÂ But 10 million people still fall ill with TB each year, with too many missing out on vital care.

The WHO package is designed to help countries close gaps in care ensuring no one is left behind. Key elements include:

- An accountability framework to coordinate actions across sectors and to monitor and review progress
- A dashboard to help countries know more about their own epidemics through real-time monitoring – by moving to electronic TB surveillance systems.
- A guide for effective prioritization of planning and implementation of impactful TB interventions based on analyses of patient pathways in accessing care.
- New WHO guidelines on infection control and preventive treatment for latent TB infection

- A civil society task force to ensure effective and meaningful civil society engagement

“This is a set of pragmatic actions that countries can use to accelerate progress and act on the high-level commitments made in the first-ever UN High Level Meeting on TB last September,” said Dr Tereza Kasaeva, Director WHO’s Global TB Programme.

On 22 March, key partners will come together at a World TB Day symposium at WHO in Geneva to develop a collaborative multi-stakeholder and multisectoral platform to accelerate actions to end TB. WHO will present the new package at the meeting.

TB is the world’s top infectious disease killer, claiming 4 500 lives each day. The heaviest burden is carried by communities facing socio-economic challenges, those working and living in high-risk settings, the poorest and marginalized.