# UK tuberculosis cases surge again, with rising drug-resistant strains and cases among UK-born populations



Cases of tuberculosis (TB) in the UK have surged markedly, with the latest figures for 2024 revealing a 13.6% rise in notifications compared to the previous year. According to data from the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), there were 5,490 reported cases in 2024, up from 4,831 in 2023. London remains the region most affected, registering the highest rate at 20.6 cases per 100,000 people, followed by the West Midlands at 11.5 per 100,000. While the majority of TB patients—approximately 82%—were born outside the UK, there has also been a concerning increase in cases among UK-born individuals, signalling a broader public health issue beyond immigrant communities.

Tuberculosis, often dismissed as a Victorian-era disease, continues to pose a significant health threat. It is preventable and curable, with 84.4% of affected patients completing treatment within a year. However, the rise in drug-resistant TB cases is alarming, as these require longer and more complicated treatment regimes. The proportion of multi-drug resistant cases reached its highest level since 2012, now constituting 2.2% of laboratory-confirmed infections. This development complicates efforts to control the disease and underscores the need for enhanced medical vigilance and resources.

Public health experts warn that the symptoms of TB can easily be mistaken for those of other respiratory illnesses, particularly Covid-19, which remains a common comparator in public consciousness. Both diseases share symptoms such as a persistent cough lasting more than three weeks and fatigue. However, TB symptoms tend to develop gradually and are often accompanied by mucus or blood in the sputum, weight loss, and a general decline in health, without the sudden changes in taste or smell typically associated with Covid-19. The emergence of new Covid variants like Stratus and Nimbus, which can cause hoarseness and throat discomfort, further complicates diagnosis. Experts strongly advise individuals, especially those who have immigrated from countries with higher TB prevalence or who have prolonged symptoms, to seek medical evaluation promptly.

Social determinants such as deprivation, homelessness, drug and alcohol dependence, and contact with the criminal justice system continue to drive TB incidence, particularly among the UK-born population. Crowded living conditions and undernutrition contribute to vulnerability, as do disruptions to healthcare services experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic, which have delayed TB diagnosis and treatment. These factors have likely exacerbated the recent rise in cases after a period of relative decline.

Government and health authorities stress that early detection and treatment are vital to breaking the chain of transmission. Efforts to combat TB must also address health inequalities linked to socioeconomic factors, with strategies targeted at urban centres like London, the West Midlands, and the North West, where the disease remains most prevalent. The UK government is developing a new National Action Plan for TB (2026–2031) aimed at improving prevention, detection, and treatment to curb the disease’s resurgence.

The Bacillus Calmette-Guérin (BCG) vaccine, once routinely given, is no longer part of the standard NHS vaccination programme except for those at higher risk, such as certain babies and children, healthcare workers, and people travelling to high-incidence countries.

While TB cases are increasing, the overall risk to the general population remains relatively low, and with proper treatment, the disease is curable. Nonetheless, the recent upward trend, particularly in drug-resistant strains and among UK-born individuals, highlights an urgent public health challenge requiring sustained attention and resources.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.scotsman.com/health/we-must-act-fast-do-not-confuse-this-common-covid-symptom-with-serious-victorian-disease-experts-warn-5354958), [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/tuberculosis-cases-in-england-continued-to-increase-in-2024), [[5]](https://www.adph.org.uk/networks/london/2025/10/09/tb-rates-in-england-continue-to-increase-in-2024/), [[4]](https://www.adph.org.uk/networks/london/2025/01/30/tuberculosis-cases-in-england-continued-to-increase/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.scotsman.com/health/we-must-act-fast-do-not-confuse-this-common-covid-symptom-with-serious-victorian-disease-experts-warn-5354958), [[5]](https://www.adph.org.uk/networks/london/2025/10/09/tb-rates-in-england-continue-to-increase-in-2024/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.scotsman.com/health/we-must-act-fast-do-not-confuse-this-common-covid-symptom-with-serious-victorian-disease-experts-warn-5354958)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.scotsman.com/health/we-must-act-fast-do-not-confuse-this-common-covid-symptom-with-serious-victorian-disease-experts-warn-5354958), [[3]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/tb-cases-rise-in-england), [[4]](https://www.adph.org.uk/networks/london/2025/01/30/tuberculosis-cases-in-england-continued-to-increase/), [[6]](https://www.euronews.com/health/2025/04/20/why-is-tuberculosis-the-worlds-deadliest-infectious-disease-on-the-rise-in-the-uk)
* Paragraph 5 – [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/tuberculosis-cases-in-england-continued-to-increase-in-2024), [[5]](https://www.adph.org.uk/networks/london/2025/10/09/tb-rates-in-england-continue-to-increase-in-2024/), [[6]](https://www.euronews.com/health/2025/04/20/why-is-tuberculosis-the-worlds-deadliest-infectious-disease-on-the-rise-in-the-uk)
* Paragraph 6 – [[5]](https://www.adph.org.uk/networks/london/2025/10/09/tb-rates-in-england-continue-to-increase-in-2024/), [[1]](https://www.scotsman.com/health/we-must-act-fast-do-not-confuse-this-common-covid-symptom-with-serious-victorian-disease-experts-warn-5354958)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.scotsman.com/health/we-must-act-fast-do-not-confuse-this-common-covid-symptom-with-serious-victorian-disease-experts-warn-5354958)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.scotsman.com/health/we-must-act-fast-do-not-confuse-this-common-covid-symptom-with-serious-victorian-disease-experts-warn-5354958), [[5]](https://www.adph.org.uk/networks/london/2025/10/09/tb-rates-in-england-continue-to-increase-in-2024/), [[6]](https://www.euronews.com/health/2025/04/20/why-is-tuberculosis-the-worlds-deadliest-infectious-disease-on-the-rise-in-the-uk)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.scotsman.com/health/we-must-act-fast-do-not-confuse-this-common-covid-symptom-with-serious-victorian-disease-experts-warn-5354958> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/tuberculosis-cases-in-england-continued-to-increase-in-2024> - In 2024, tuberculosis (TB) cases in England rose by 13% compared to 2023, with 5,480 notifications. London had the highest regional rate at 20.6 per 100,000, followed by the West Midlands at 11.5 per 100,000. The majority of cases (81.5%) were in individuals born outside the UK, though increases were observed in both UK-born and non-UK-born populations. TB remains associated with deprivation and is more prevalent in large urban areas. Drug-resistant TB cases also increased, requiring more complex treatment. Early identification and treatment are crucial to break transmission chains. Individuals with a persistent cough lasting more than three weeks are advised to consult their GP, especially if they have recently moved from countries where TB is more common.
3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/tb-cases-rise-in-england> - In 2023, TB cases in England increased by 10.7% compared to 2022, with 4,850 notifications. This rise indicates a rebound to levels above pre-pandemic numbers. While England remains a low-incidence country for TB, the current trajectory moves further from the World Health Organization's 2035 elimination targets. TB is a bacterial infection primarily affecting the lungs, with symptoms including a cough lasting more than three weeks, high temperature, night sweats, loss of appetite, and weight loss. It can be treated with a prolonged course of antibiotics but can be serious if not treated. The proportion of TB notifications accounted for by people born outside the UK has been steadily rising for several years. However, the increase in TB in 2023 has now been seen in both UK-born and non-UK-born populations in England. The largest rises in cases have been in the urban centres of London, the North West, and West Midlands. TB continues to be associated with deprivation and is more common in large urban areas. People born outside the UK, especially in countries in South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh), Africa (Eritrea, Nigeria), and Eastern Europe (Romania) experience the highest number of cases. For those born in the UK, TB is more common among those who experience homelessness, drug and alcohol dependence, and have had contact with the criminal justice system.
4. <https://www.adph.org.uk/networks/london/2025/01/30/tuberculosis-cases-in-england-continued-to-increase/> - Provisional data for 2024 indicates a 13% increase in reported TB notifications in England compared to 2023, rising from 4,850 to 5,480 cases. England remains a low-incidence country for TB, but the notification rate increased from 8.5 per 100,000 population in 2023 to 9.5 per 100,000 in 2024. Notably, 81.5% of all TB notifications in 2024 were among individuals born outside the UK, though increases were seen in both UK-born and non-UK-born populations. TB remains associated with deprivation and is more prevalent in large urban areas. The largest increases in TB notifications in 2024 were recorded in London and the West Midlands. Among UK-born individuals, TB is more common among those experiencing homelessness, drug or alcohol dependency, and contact with the criminal justice system.
5. <https://www.adph.org.uk/networks/london/2025/10/09/tb-rates-in-england-continue-to-increase-in-2024/> - New data from the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) shows a 13.6% increase in TB cases in England in 2024, with 5,490 notifications compared to 4,831 in 2023. Despite the rise, the overall risk to the general population remains low, and TB is both preventable and curable—84.4% of patients complete treatment within 12 months. The increase reflects global trends and continues to be linked to social determinants such as deprivation and urban living. London recorded the highest regional rate at 20.6 per 100,000. TB remains more prevalent among people born outside the UK, though rates have risen in both UK-born and non-UK-born populations. Drug-resistant TB reached its highest level since 2012, with 2.2% of lab-confirmed cases showing resistance to multiple drugs, requiring more complex treatment. UKHSA urges early identification and treatment to break transmission chains. A persistent cough lasting more than three weeks may be a symptom—individuals at risk are encouraged to contact their GP. The government is developing a new TB National Action Plan (2026–2031), focusing on prevention, detection, and reducing health inequalities.
6. <https://www.euronews.com/health/2025/04/20/why-is-tuberculosis-the-worlds-deadliest-infectious-disease-on-the-rise-in-the-uk> - In 2024, England reported 5,480 TB cases, up 13% from 2023, marking the biggest annual jump since at least 1971. This increase is attributed to factors such as disruptions in medical care during the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to a backlog of TB infections now being detected. TB risks are higher among people who are homeless, living in crowded settings, currently or formerly imprisoned, have a history of drug or alcohol misuse, or are grappling with undernutrition. The uptick in cases is likely due in part to these social determinants, though the exact reasons remain under investigation. The rise in TB cases among UK-born individuals, after years of decline, is particularly concerning. Experts emphasize the need for improved detection and treatment to address this public health challenge.