

More specialists needed in war against TB

Senior consultant says they are occupied with treating other respiratory illnesses apart from tuberculosis, which has seen a dramatic rise in cases.

[Dineskumar Ragu](#) - 26 Mar 2023, 10:30am



Respiratory physician Dr Arvindran Alaga said it will be difficult for Malaysia to achieve the WHO's target of eradicating TB by 2035. (Freepik pic)

GEORGE TOWN: A shortage of respiratory physicians is holding back the battle to eradicate tuberculosis, according to a senior consultant.

Dr Arvindran Alaga said there are only 41 respiratory physicians in Malaysia, making it tough for the country to achieve the World Health Organization's target of eradicating TB by 2035.

The specialists also treat other related illnesses such as severe asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, he said.

There is also a dire need for more specialists to treat drug-resistant TB, which is more severe than common TB, and patients need to undergo a long period of monitoring and treatment.



Dr Arvindran Alaga.

Arvindran, who heads the respiratory medicine department at Hospital Sultanah Bahiyah in Alor Setar, said the cost of tests and anti-TB treatment should be reviewed at the global level so more people can benefit from the reduction.

Malaysian Medical Association president Dr Muruga Raj Rajathurai urged the government to look into training general practitioners to detect TB early, as this could improve outcomes and reduce expenditure.

He said funds were needed to train more respiratory physicians, conduct more research and ensure an ample supply of medicines to treat the disease.

Muruga said the Covid-19 pandemic had hampered efforts in detecting TB cases. “In Malaysia, case detection dropped by 10%. Allocation of funds and resources to manage TB was also affected as budgets were prioritised for managing the pandemic,” he said.

Last week, health minister Dr Zaliha Mustafa said the number of TB cases in the country has risen by 17%, and the number of deaths by 12%.