

South Africa launches plan to curb rampant TB in gold mines

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South Africa on Saturday launched a plan to diagnose tuberculosis in the country's gold mines, where the disease's incidence is the highest in the world.

Speaking to mine managers in Driefontein, Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe said the goal was to "ensure that all mine workers, particularly in the gold mining sector, are screened and tested for TB and HIV over the next 12 months."

The Driefontein Fields gold mine, located about 70 kilometres (40 miles) north of Johannesburg, is a flagship for an industry that has been on the decline but remains lucrative and employs more than 160,000 people.

[Tuberculosis](#) is rampant in all South African mines but incidence is particular high in [gold mines](#) due to horrendous conditions causing illnesses such as silicosis, which destroys the lungs of [miners](#) exposed to silica dust.

Gold mines are often older than platinum mines for example and workers at Driefontein sometimes descend as deep as 12,000 feet below the surface to hoist back tonnes of rock.

"Most of us may not be aware that gold mines have three times the amount of TB compared to the general population," Motlanthe said.

The campaign aims to equip the mines' health teams with a new diagnosis system, GeneXpert.

Motlanthe said the latest screening campaign showed that seven percent of those tested positive were found to have drug-resistant tuberculosis.

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