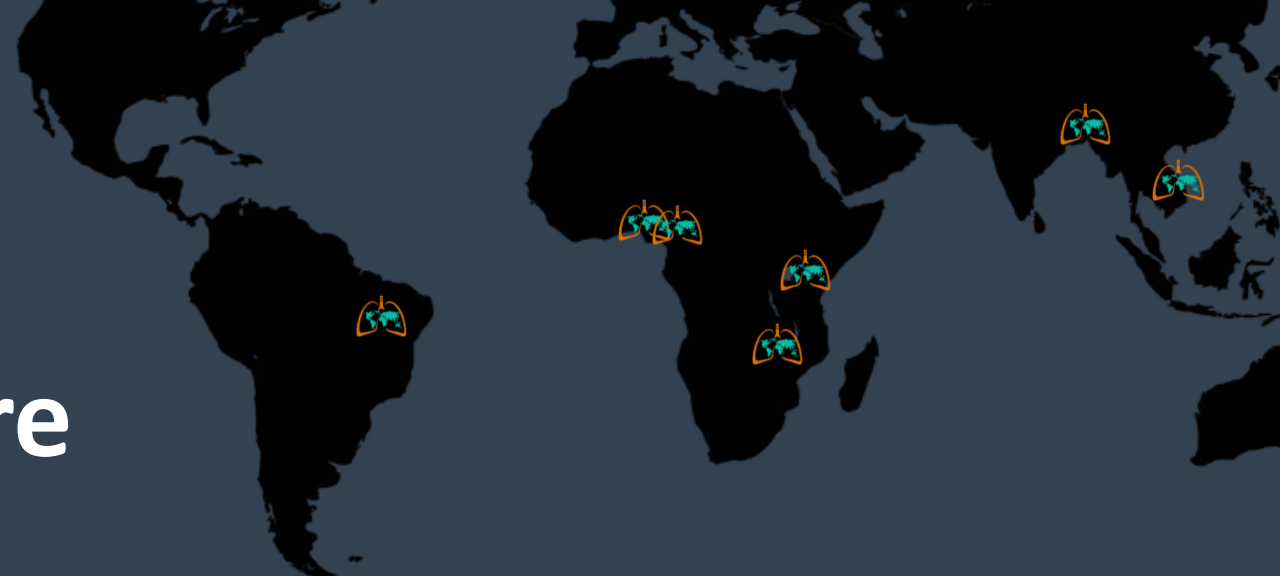


Pooled Testing for TB – Evidence Gaps and Future Priorities

Jacob Creswell, Stop TB Partnership
ASLM LabCoP Webinar | 16 April 2026



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Current WHO Recommendations



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- 2026 WHO recommendations are conditional
- Proposes pools from 2-4 samples
- Only includes data from Xpert testing
- Adults and adolescents included
- Doesn't include PLHIV (limited evidence), children (insufficient evidence), or individuals at increased risk of drug resistance

'When resources are limited'

Department for HIV, Tuberculosis,
Hepatitis and Sexually Transmitted
Infections

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Near point-of-care tests, tongue swabs, and sputum pooling for TB

▼ Near point-of-care tests, tongue swabs, and sputum pooling for TB

[NPOC-NAATs](#)

[Tongue swabs on LC-aNAATs](#)

[Sputum pooling](#)

Future Work Needed



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- Pooling can be disease and system with other platforms (Pluslife)
- Already underway as part of TB REACH-supported work in Cameroon (groups of three) and will be included in Start4All Phase 2
- Early results look promising, dilution with swab tests may be less of an issue
- Some work with Truenat pooled testing as well underway



Future Work Needed



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- Pools of more than 4: in practice and in a few studies, this is being done
 - At low positivity rates, could pools of 5, 6 or have sufficient sensitivity?
- Pooling in different populations
 - Should not make a difference for specific populations – but rather for bacterial load in those populations.



Future Work Needed



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- Everyone who has a positive test for TB should get an initial rapid DST (Xpert/Truenat)
 - In many settings RIF resistance is very low.
 - For people with positive Pluslife results, is pooled testing for RIF resistance feasible?
- Math is clear – how does this work in practice?
 - Documenting gains in access to molecular tests the real world, how transport systems are employed, what changes are needed to drive larger numbers of people with presumptive TB?
 - How to integrate with NPOC tests?



Future Work Needed



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- Documenting pooling processes in lab
 - Who makes decisions, what resources are needed, how to lab techs work with pooled testing?
- Both NPOC and pooled testing saw drop-offs in performance with very low and trace Ultra semiquantitative results
- What does this mean for different screening populations?
- For ACF? Primary care level? How do yield patient characteristics matter for bacillary load?



The Start4All Partnership



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www.lstmed.ac.uk/start4all/acknowledgements

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