



MEDIA RELEASE

STATE OF TENNESSEE
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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“TOGETHER WE CAN” ELIMINATE TUBERCULOSIS

World TB Day is March 24, 2010

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – The Department of Health will join health providers around the globe in observing World TB Day on March 24. This annual health observance is designed to raise awareness and knowledge about tuberculosis, a treatable, curable and preventable disease. While data show TB may be on the decline in Tennessee and the United States, among infectious diseases, it remains the second leading killer of adults in the world and claims more than two million lives each year.

“It is tragic that so many people die each year from tuberculosis, as this is a disease we can prevent or cure when individuals are infected,” said Tennessee Health Commissioner Susan R. Cooper, MSN, RN. “We want to help educate Tennesseans on how to avoid infection with this illness, and encourage those who may have been exposed to seek testing and treatment.”

The theme of World TB Day 2010 is “**TB Elimination: Together We Can!**” TB control efforts are having a positive impact. In 2009, data show 202 active TB cases were diagnosed and reported to the Tennessee Department of Health, bringing the state’s case rate to 3.2 people per 100,000 population. The numbers show a decline from 2008, when Tennessee had 282 active cases and a rate of 4.5 per 100,000. Nationwide, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports the country’s TB case rate declined 11.3 percent last year, with 11,540 cases reported in the United States. In 2008, 12,905 TB cases were reported nationwide.

The World Health Organization estimates one-third of the world’s population is infected with TB bacilli, the microbes that cause TB, and therefore have latent tuberculosis. WHO also estimates one in 10 people infected with TB bacilli will become sick with active TB in their lifetime and notes that no country is TB-free.

“Our aim in Tennessee and nationally is the elimination of TB. While we were pleased by the decrease in TB cases in Tennessee in 2009, we have already seen a significant increase in cases during the first months of 2010,” said Tennessee TB Control Officer Jon Warkentin, MD, MPH. “Although TB is now less common in Tennessee, sometimes active TB disease masquerades as more common illnesses such as community-acquired pneumonia. For that reason, it is critical for physicians to be mindful that TB still exists in our state and remains a significant public health threat.”

TB usually affects the lungs but can also affect other parts of the body such as the brain, kidneys and spine. Symptoms of TB in the lungs may include a persistent cough for three or more weeks, chest pain with breathing and coughing up blood. General symptoms of active TB

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may include loss of appetite, weakness, weight loss, fever and night sweats. If active TB is not treated quickly and appropriately, the disease can be fatal. Tennessee state law requires physicians, laboratories and hospitals to promptly report all confirmed and suspected cases of active TB their local health departments.

Persons at high risk for TB include individuals born in countries that have high rates of TB, persons with HIV infection and AIDS, homeless persons, people who have spent time in jail or prison, intravenous drug users, and those who have had close interactions with persons who have infectious TB disease.

The Tennessee Department of Health recommends individuals who are at high risk for TB have a skin test to find out if they have TB infection. Effective treatment is available to those infected with the TB bacterium, which significantly reduces the chance of developing active TB disease in the future. All Tennessee county health departments offer free TB risk screening, confidential skin testing and treatment for those at high risk for infection. A list of local health departments is available online at <http://health.state.tn.us/localdepartments.htm>, or by calling the toll-free Tennessee Anytime Help Desk at 1-866-8TN-EGOV.

World TB Day activities are planned in all 13 of Tennessee's public health regions. To learn more about TB in Tennessee, visit the Department of Health's Web site at <http://health.state.tn.us/CEDS/TB/index.htm>.

To get more information about World TB Day in the United States, visit the CDC Web site at www.cdc.gov/tb/events/WorldTBDay/default.htm.

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