



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

RSA Tower 201 Monroe Street, Suite 914 Montgomery, AL 36104

Phone 334-206-5300 Fax 334-206-5534

www.adph.org

Now is the time to eliminate TB

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Nancy Brook
(334) 206-5330
nbrook@adph.state.al.us

Anic Lopez
(334) 206-5330
alopez@adph.state.al.us

March 24 is World TB Day. On this day in 1882 Dr. Robert Koch announced the discovery of the tuberculosis bacillus. Observance of this day is intended to raise awareness about the devastating health and economic consequences of TB, its impact on developing countries, and its continued threat to global health.

Many people think that TB is a disease of the past--an illness that no longer threatens us today. One reason for this belief is that the United States is seeing continuing declines in tuberculosis, reaching an all-time low in the number of newly reported cases of TB.

During the mid and late 1980s the United States experienced a sharp increase in the number of cases reported after resources were redirected into other concerns in the 1970s and 1980s. The nation mobilized additional resources into efforts to control tuberculosis in the 1990s. This recent recovery has put the nation back on track toward TB elimination.

Nationally, the year 2001 represented the ninth consecutive year of decline in reported cases. In 2001 there were 15,991 cases of TB disease reported in the United States, declining percent from 16,377 cases in 2000.

The TB success story extends to Alabama. In 2001, the state had 45 fewer cases and experienced a 14.5 percent decrease in verified reported cases compared to the previous year. This continues a more than decade-long trend of annual declines in the rate of TB disease in Alabama.

That very success makes us vulnerable to the complacency and neglect that come with the declining numbers; however, it also gives us an opportunity to eliminate TB in this state and country.

TB is caused by a germ called Mycobacterium tuberculosis. When a person with infectious TB disease (TB that can be spread from one individual to another) coughs or sneezes, tiny particles containing M. tuberculosis may be expelled into the air. Another person inhaling the air containing the bacteria may develop latent TB infection. An estimated 10 to 15 million persons in the United States have latent TB infection. About 10 percent of these individuals will develop TB disease at some point in their lives.

People coinfected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, and TB are much more likely to develop active TB disease during their lifetime than people without HIV infection. Approximately 10 to 15 percent of the national total of TB cases are reported among people living with HIV. Another population of increasing concern is the growing proportion of cases in the U.S. among people born outside the U.S. In 2001, more than 12 percent of the cases reported in Alabama were among foreign-born individuals, an increase over the 7 percent reported in 2000. Estimates suggest that more than half of U.S. reported cases may occur in foreign-born individuals by 2002. These changes reflect the global magnitude of TB as an important public health problem.

If individuals with active TB do not complete the recommended therapy, they can develop and spread strains of TB that are resistant to available drugs. One case of multi-drug resistant TB can cost up to \$1 million to treat. Forty-five states (including Alabama) and the District of Columbia have reported diagnosing and caring for persons with this condition.

In order to control and ultimately reach the goal TB elimination, Alabama Department of Public Health's Division of TB Control provides services to diagnose and medications to treat active TB disease cases as well as identify and evaluate persons exposed to TB and at risk of developing latent infection.

To maintain and continue the momentum of declining new cases, medications are delivered to TB patients through the directly observed therapy program. Under this program, a tuberculosis control staff member, or other responsible person, observes and records the patient taking the anti-TB drugs. This practice, gaining widespread popularity in other states, ensures that patients receive an adequate and complete course of therapy to cure active disease and prevent the transmission of the tuberculosis bacteria to others.

Other field staff activities of the Division of TB Control include case management, contact investigation, training of health department staff, and consultation services to other facilities and state agencies.

Alabama's TB Control Program has consistently met or exceeded all Centers for Disease Control and Prevention program guidelines in areas such as completion or recommended therapy, investigation and examination of contacts, and completion of therapy for latent TB infection. Alabama is recognized nationwide as a model TB control program.

For more information about TB, contact the TB Control Division, Alabama Department of Public Health, at (334) 206-5330. Information is also available on the department's website at www.adph.org.

3/21/02