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Record Low Tuberculosis Cases in Illinois – But State Remains Among the Highest in the Nation

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) is recognizing March 24, 2013 as World Tuberculosis Day (TB) and encouraging Illinoisans to learn about the disease in order to help stop the spread. Illinois ranks sixth in the nation for the highest number of tuberculosis cases. While tuberculosis is not common in the United States, it is still circulating around the world.

“Although Illinois experienced a record low number of new tuberculosis cases during 2012, the increase in cases worldwide can mean more cases here,” said Illinois Department of Public Health Director Dr. LaMar Hasbrouck. “It is important to raise awareness of TB and for people to know how the disease is spread, what the symptoms are and how to treat it. Educating yourself about tuberculosis and raising awareness in others will help stop the spread of TB.”

Tuberculosis is a contagious and potentially life-threatening disease that is transmitted from person to person through the air when a person with active TB coughs or sneezes. People with TB disease are most likely to spread the germs to people they spend time with every day, such as family members or coworkers. If you have been around someone who has TB disease, you should go to your doctor or your local health department for tests.

While TB can affect any part of the body, such as the brain, kidneys or spine, tuberculosis usually affects the lungs. General symptoms may include fatigue, weight loss, fever and night sweats. When tuberculosis attacks the lungs, symptoms can include a persistent cough that sometimes produces blood and chest pains.

TB disease can be treated by taking several drugs for six to 12 months. It is very important for people who have TB disease to finish the medicine and take the drugs exactly as prescribed. Many patients comply with the strict drug regimen at first, but some stop taking their anti-TB medication after they start to feel better. Failure to follow the therapy for the full length of time prescribed may allow the tuberculosis to return. In some cases, the re-established infection cannot be treated with the usual antibiotics. TB that is resistant to drugs is harder and more expensive to treat.

In 2012, 347 cases of active tuberculosis were reported in Illinois, a decrease from 359 cases reported in 2011. The record low number of cases in Illinois can largely be attributed to Directly Observed
Therapy (DOT), a program to make sure those with TB complete their full medication regimen. Therapy often involves health department staff meeting regularly with patients who have TB to watch them take their medications. Fewer cases of TB in Illinois is also due to local health departments working with IDPH to identify those who have had close and extended contact with someone with TB, and treating appropriate cases for latent tuberculosis infection.

Following the national trend, the majority of TB cases in Illinois are among individuals who were born in foreign countries where TB is common, such as Mexico, India and the Philippines. In 2012, 69 percent of tuberculosis cases in Illinois were among people born in foreign countries.

Efforts to end TB include developing new treatments, increasing the capacity of health professionals to provide treatment and issuing new recommendations for improved testing for U.S. immigrants.

To learn more about how tuberculosis is spread, the symptoms and how to treat it, log onto the IDPH website at www.idph.state.il.us/health/infect/reportdis/tb.htm.

You can also join a webcast hosted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on Friday, March 22 at 12:30-2:00 pm. World TB Day provides an opportunity to raise awareness about TB-related problems and solutions and to support worldwide TB-control efforts. While great strides have been made to control and cure TB, this disease is still a problem in many parts of the world, including the United States. The webcast will highlight personal stories from TB patients, provisional 2012 TB surveillance data, and the burden of TB in the United States.

Webcast Information:

Watch the live webcast with a broadband or slower connection. (For technical support, call 404 639-3737)

Note: The webcast links are only active during the day and time of the session, but the session will be archived for future viewing.

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