



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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World TB Day raises awareness of tuberculosis disease

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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March 24 is World TB Day, and this year the event intends to raise awareness about the devastating health and economic consequences of tuberculosis.

The discovery of the TB bacillus was announced in Berlin on March 24, 1882, by Dr. Robert Koch, the doctor who discovered it. His discovery was the most important step taken toward the control and elimination of the deadly disease that was killing one out of seven people living in the United States and Europe during the 19th century. In 1982, the first World TB Day was sponsored by the World Health Organization and the International Union Against TB and Lung Disease.

"Many people believe that tuberculosis is a disease of the past, but this is not the case," said Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer. "Today in the 21st century, TB is still one of the leading global causes of death from infectious disease, even though it is readily treatable and preventable."

Each year, approximately 8 million new cases of TB occur and nearly 2 million deaths are attributed to TB around the world.

Reported cases of TB in the U.S. dropped to 14,871 in 2003, which represents a decline in cases nationally for the eleventh straight year. Alabama reported 211 cases in 2004, a decrease of 18 percent compared to what was reported in 2003.

TB is an airborne disease that can affect the lungs as well as other organs. People who are infected with TB do not always feel sick, have symptoms, or spread the germ unless their infection develops into active TB disease. However, left untreated, each person with active TB can infect, on average, 10 to 15 people every year.

"A simple skin test will show if an individual has come into contact with the tuberculosis bacteria," explained Pam Barrett, training coordinator and prison liaison for the Division of TB Control at the Alabama Department of Public Health. "If the test is positive, further tests can be performed to determine whether exposure has developed into active TB disease."

People who should receive a TB skin test include the following:

- anyone who has been in contact with someone sick with active tuberculosis,

- residents and employees of nursing homes, homeless shelters, prisons or migrant farm camps,
- anyone having HIV infection, or
- anyone who injects drugs and/or shares needles.

TB must be treated immediately with the proper medications and for the correct period of time. If not treated properly, the TB germs may become resistant to the medicine and become more dangerous and difficult to kill.

For more information on tuberculosis, please call the Division of TB Control at the Alabama Department of Public Health, 334-206-5330, or your local health department.

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