



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Alabama celebrates World TB Day, March 24

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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World TB Day commemorates the achievement of Dr. Robert Koch who announced the discovery of the TB bacillus in Berlin on March 24, 1882. His discovery was an important step forward in the diagnosis and treatment of a deadly disease. In the late 19th century, tuberculosis killed one out of seven people living in the United States and Europe.

The first World TB Day was sponsored by the World Health Organization in 1982. Today, the annual event is intended to raise awareness about progress in battling this disease, and to reflect upon the work that remains.

Many people think that tuberculosis is a disease of the past, but this is not the case. 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 nearly 2 million deaths are attributed to TB around the world.

In Alabama, reported TB cases have generally been in decline since the mid 1940s. This decline is due (in large part) to the foresight of physicians who assured that a viable TB control infrastructure was maintained after the closure of the freestanding "TB hospitals" or sanitoriums.

However, this year is historic because the Alabama Department of Public Health reported fewer than 200 cases of TB for the first time since record keeping began in 1923. The total number of cases reported in 2006 was 196 cases – compared to 423 cases just 10 years ago.

"Unfortunately, declining case counts create a new challenge," according to Scott Jones, interim director for the Division of TB Control. "Fewer cases of tuberculosis each year may actually precipitate the phenomenon of 'delayed diagnosis' because younger physicians have fewer opportunities to see or treat cases of TB during their career."

Jones said that it is the undiagnosed TB patient that poses the greatest risk for transmission of this disease.

As we celebrate World TB Day, it is appropriate to note that we still depend upon Dr. Koch's discovery to determine if someone has been infected with TB. The simple skin test – pioneered so long ago – is still an important tool in the physician's arsenal.

For more information 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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