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March 23, 2012

For immediate release

DHHR says TB is still a concern in West Virginia

March 24 is World TB Day, and West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources officials say that help is available for those suffering from Tuberculosis.

World TB Day marks the anniversary of the date in 1882 when Dr. Robert Koch announced the discovery of the TB bacillus. This day is set aside to build public awareness that tuberculosis remains an epidemic in much of the world, causing the deaths of several million people each year, primarily in the developing countries. In the late 19th century, TB killed 1 out of every 7 people in the United States and Europe. Today, TB is the second leading cause of death in the world, with more than 2 million TB-related deaths annually.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), tuberculosis is caused by a bacterium called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* that usually attacks the lungs but could attack other parts of the body such as the kidney, spine and brain. If not treated properly, TB disease can be fatal. The DHHR's Office of Epidemiology and Prevention Services (OEPS) oversees the state's DTBE and State Epidemiologist and OEPS Director Dr. Loretta Haddy said, "TB is here in the U.S., and it's here in WV," adding "Anyone who has a bad cough lasting 3 weeks or longer, especially with pain in the chest, coughing up blood or sputum, weakness, weight loss, loss of appetite, chills and/or fever should seek medical care to have TB ruled out."

There are two forms of TB-related conditions that affect people. Latent TB infection is a condition in which the bacterium lives in the body without making a person sick. It is not infectious, and the body's immune system keeps the bacteria from causing TB disease. However, the TB bacterium can become active and multiply in the body, causing active TB disease, which is infectious and can be fatal. According to 2011 Data from WV Division of TB Elimination (DTBE) 13 people were diagnosed with TB disease in WV, of which 3 died. In addition, there were 288 people diagnosed with Latent TB infection (LTBI). Of the 288, 10% will progress to active TB disease in their lifetime if left untreated. DTBE is now focusing on finding and treating LTBI to work toward eliminating TB in the state.

The TB elimination division's goal is to assist those with TB by providing education, medical assistance and patient support. To learn more about World TB Day or to find out more about the disease go to www.tb.wv.gov or call 1-800-330-8126.