

News Release

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Key Tuberculosis Drug Shortage Continues

Increasing alarm about access to the supply of essential public health drugs

California, January 29, 2013 – Isoniazid (INH), one of the most effective and best-studied medications used to treat tuberculosis (TB) has been in short supply since November 2012.

The three US suppliers of INH cite problems with the active ingredient used to make INH to explain the current shortage. Two of the three suppliers have just resumed shipping INH, but supply is not yet meeting demand. The third supplier is not expected to produce again until 2014. “Unfortunately, this situation is a familiar one for us. Shortages of drugs needed to treat multi drug resistant TB are an ongoing problem. Local TB programs are tasked to develop plans to ration their INH supply, but the diversion of limited resources are cause for great concern throughout California. We don’t how long this will continue,” said Dr. Julie Higashi, President of the California Tuberculosis Controller’s Association (CTCA).

A reliable drug supply is essential for limiting the spread of TB, preventing new TB cases, and preventing development of drug resistant TB. Over a third of the world’s population is infected with TB. TB is spread from person to person when a person with TB disease coughs, suspending small particles with TB in the air, and people sharing the same airspace breathe in the particles with TB. Because TB is spread through the air and there is no effective vaccine to prevent TB infection, treatment is the only way to stop the spread of TB in the community. Effective TB treatment requires daily medications for at least six to nine months.

California has one of every five TB cases identified in the U.S., and every other day a Californian dies with TB. In addition, an estimated 2.3 million Californians have TB infection, the form of TB in which a person’s immune system is able to keep the TB germs under control. Medical conditions that weaken the immune system like diabetes, HIV or simply the aging process make it more likely for people with TB infection to progress to active, contagious TB disease.

“Isoniazid is one of the most important drugs that clinicians use to treat active TB disease and TB infection. The current supply shortage weakens treatment regimens and forces health care providers to use other less reliable medications to cure this disease. As we move forward, we need to identify solutions to maintain an adequate supply of resources and prevent future shortages to ensure the health of all residents in our communities,” said Jonathan E. Fielding, MD, MPH, Health Officer and Director of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health. Los Angeles County reports the highest number of TB cases in California.

Health officials and others involved in TB control convened in Washington, D.C. last week to formulate a national approach to address the drug shortage. CTCA and other groups urge their federal partners to create policies and a national office to assure access to anti-TB and other critical medications and eliminate drug shortages.

Visit the CTCA website at www.ctca.org for more information about TB and the drug shortage situation.