

Media Release

On behalf of
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Tuberculosis, a Disease of Neglect, Remains a Threat in California

California, March 18, 2013 – World TB Day, March 24th, is recognized each year by the global public health community to mark the successes and challenges in our efforts to control and eliminate Tuberculosis (TB) around the world.

TB is a disease of neglect, spreading where patients cannot access health care services and exposures to TB cannot be adequately investigated. Over a third of the world's population is estimated to have TB infection. People become infected when a person with TB disease coughs, and those sharing the same air breathe in the TB. Because there is yet no effective vaccine to prevent TB, early detection and treatment are the only ways to prevent cases of TB. Internationally, drug resistant TB is becoming more common and requires more medication and much longer treatment courses than the usual six to nine months.

Public health programs are given unique authority to provide services that are essential for keeping TB under control. "For example, we routinely go into communities to locate people who we are concerned may have active TB or who have been exposed to TB and link them to care. In some cases we may need to isolate infectious patients to limit the spread of TB and make sure that patients are taking the right medications each day. We do this in as compassionate way as possible that puts the patient first, while still keeping true to our mission to protect the community from the spread of disease," said Dr. Julie Higashi, President of the California TB Controller's Association (CTCA).

More recently, another challenge to TB control efforts in the U.S. has been the shortage of isoniazid, one of the most important drugs to treat TB. "Ensuring an adequate drug supply for treating TB is another unique public health function," said Dr. Higashi, "TB programs in California have been cut steadily since the mid-2000's, threatening our efforts to control TB and making it extremely difficult to take on a new challenge like the drug shortage. Unfortunately, TB programs are preparing for more cuts as sequestration takes effect."

"With one out of five TB cases in the U.S. identified in California, we urge members of US House of Representatives from California to join the TB Elimination Caucus to help raise awareness about the urgency of a fully-funded response to TB domestically and globally," says Joanne Carter, Executive Director RESULTS and RESULTS Educational Fund. Leadership at the highest level is needed to maintain control over TB and avoid resurgence due to neglect.

Visit the CTCA website at www.ctca.org for more information about TB and those working to control it in your communities.