

NEWS RELEASE



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On World Tuberculosis Day, Los Angeles County Reminds Residents and Communities At Risk for Tuberculosis to Get Tested and Treated

LA County Reports Some of the Nation's Highest Annual TB Case Numbers

LOS ANGELES – With local landmarks lit up red tomorrow on World Tuberculosis Day Thursday, March 24, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (Public Health) encourages residents to get tested for tuberculosis (TB), a deadly disease that can be dormant—or latent—for many years.

World TB Day is a global reminder to encourage residents and communities who are at elevated risk for TB, or who are experiencing symptoms, to get tested. Union Station in Downtown LA, and the entrance columns at Los Angeles International Airport, will be lit red to commemorate the day and serve as a 'red alert.' Public Health and the CDC encourage more Americans to learn about and recognize the disease and urge them to "Think. Test. Treat."

Tuberculosis is an airborne disease that spreads among people sharing the same air space. But for many people with a latent tuberculosis infection (LTBI), the TB germs are dormant in their body; the germs have not yet made them sick, and these people are not yet contagious. If the TB germs become active and multiply, the infection may lead to spread to others and serious illness or death. Testing is crucial to identify LTBI and to start early treatment to prevent the onset of tuberculosis disease. COVID-19 infections in TB patients and survivors also increases risk of death.

In recent years, Los Angeles County has recorded some of the largest numbers of TB cases in the U.S. In 2020, 459 cases were reported, the highest in the nation, with higher case rates in Latinx, Asian, and Black multigenerational households. Additionally, 90% of County TB Cases were identified as Asian/Pacific Islander or Latinx. In recent years, the County also has reported outbreaks indicating local transmission among people experiencing homelessness and among individuals with substance abuse and HIV or who were incarcerated.

However, after more than two pandemic years of stalled global travel and immigration, interrupted medical care, and other factors, accurate TB case numbers in LA County may not be fully known. COVID-19 likely disrupted patient TB diagnosis and treatment which may be

why in 2021, County TB disease cases rose just 2.8% - to 470 reported cases. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates there are 708,640 cases of LTBI in the County, or about seven out of every 100 County residents.

An average of 12% of diagnosed cases in LA County die with TB annually. In 2020, the TB death rate increased to 17%. As a comparison, on average, 1.1% of County residents died from COVID-19 in 2020.

Anyone can get TB, but some communities are at higher risk because of where they were born or where they travel, as TB is especially prevalent in regions of Asia (including Vietnam, the Philippines, China) and parts of Latin America (including Mexico, Guatemala).

Public Health is focused on increasing TB testing and treatment to prevent the deadly impacts of TB, but many residents aren't aware of the need to get tested if they don't have symptoms or may not view TB as a deadly disease that is circulating in the County. Public Health is focusing on outreach and education with the Coalition to End TB in Los Angeles County – a network of community organizations, community healthcare providers, TB survivors, and state and national public health partners that plan and implement strategies to 'think, test, and treat' latent TB infection.

"Because TB can be 'slow-moving,' some people with active TB may not know they are infected, and it may take months or years for a diagnosis," said Dr. Barbara Ferrer, PhD, MPH, MEd, Director of Public Health. "Early detection and treatment are crucial in helping to prevent the disease from developing and spreading, especially in communities that are under-resourced for medical and social services and are already hard-hit by the pandemic.

TB typically affects the lungs, but it may also affect the brain, kidneys, or the spine. Symptoms include feeling sick or weak, weight loss, fever, and night sweats. TB disease of the lungs includes symptoms of coughing, chest pain, and coughing up blood. When a person with tuberculosis disease coughs, sneezes, speaks, or sings, the TB germs can stay in the air for several hours, infecting others with TB.

To further raise awareness in higher-risk communities, the CDC is using trucks displaying LED signs lit up with TB information in multiple languages driving across LA County, including Filipino, Vietnamese and Chinese communities in the West San Gabriel Valley (including Monterey Park, Alhambra, San Gabriel, Rosemead, El Monte), the San Fernando Valley (including Panorama City, Northridge, North Hills, San Fernando), Glendale and Northeast L.A. (including Eagle Rock, Glassell Park), and the East San Gabriel Valley (including Hacienda Heights, Rowland Heights, West Covina).

To get tested, see Public Health's TB Control program website at ph.lacounty.gov/tb, talk to your healthcare provider, or if you don't have health insurance visit dhs.lacounty.gov/my-health-la/. Testing is also available at Public Health Centers in Lancaster (661 471-4861), Pacoima (818 896-1903) and Monrovia (626 256-1600). Other clinics can be found at <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/chs/phcenters.htm>.