



News Release

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Tuberculosis down slightly, remains a concern in Washington

Disease continues to affect local communities; antibiotic resistant cases up globally

OLYMPIA — Washington has had a slight decline in tuberculosis (TB) cases in 2014 but state and local public health officials are still on high alert when it comes to this disease. TB is second only to HIV/AIDS as the greatest infectious killer worldwide.

March 24 is World TB Day – a day set aside to share solutions and discuss issues related to this disease that infects about nine million people and kills around two million of them worldwide each year. As part of the World TB Day festivities, the Washington State Department of Health is hosting an educational event, “[One State. One World. Working to Eliminate TB, at Town Hall Seattle.](#)” This event will demonstrate how TB impacts local communities, show obstacles facing patients with the disease, and provide education on drug and vaccine development for this illness. Several local organizations will be onsite to share their work in the fight against TB. [Event information is available online, where people who want to attend may RSVP.](#)

About a third of the world’s population is infected with TB, which is a dangerous [bacterial infection that usually affects the lungs](#) but can attack other parts of the body. Infection is common and easily treated if it’s an early stage called latent TB infection (LTBI), but when it develops into disease, it’s more complex and serious. Last year, 193 cases of TB were reported in Washington – an 8 percent decrease from the 209 cases reported in 2013. TB rates in our state are typically lower than the national average; however, some communities have TB rates substantially higher than the national average. Efforts to eliminate the deadly disease in our state must be tailored to address diversity of affected populations.

“Tuberculosis remains a disease of concern internationally and in Washington,” State Communicable Disease Epidemiologist Dr. Scott Lindquist said. “TB can be diagnosed, treated, and cured, yet it takes real commitment and effort to effectively deal with this disease.”

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TB symptoms may include fever, night sweats, fatigue, weight loss, and a persistent cough. Some people may be infected with the disease and have no symptoms. Timely treatment with proper antibiotics is vital to surviving the disease, lessening the severity of symptoms, and preventing further spread of TB. People with weakened immune systems – such as young children, the elderly, and those facing certain health conditions such as diabetes, organ transplantation, and HIV or AIDS – are at increased risk of the disease, if infected. The disease is spread in the air when someone who's infected coughs, sneezes, or speaks and others breathe in the bacteria. The counties with the most cases in 2014 were King (100), Snohomish (18), Clark (15), Pierce (13), Yakima (11), and Thurston (7).

Drug-resistant TB continues to be a serious public health threat in Washington. This variation requires longer treatment periods with drugs that are more expensive. In 2014, 20 cases reported to the state health department were resistant to one or more drugs currently used as a first line of treatment for TB; two were multi-drug resistant. Infection control procedures must be in place in hospitals or health care settings to prevent exposure to this disease and keep it from spreading.

TB rates are often higher among racial and ethnic groups. In 2014, 72.5 percent of cases in the state were in people born outside the U.S. or its territories. In 2014, 43.5 percent of all cases in Washington were among Asians, followed by Hispanics (15.5 percent), blacks (15.5 percent), and whites (11.9 percent). Between 2012 and 2014 the greatest risk of TB in Washington was among Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander communities (27.7 cases per 100,000).

Health care providers, lab workers, and public health agencies must continue to work together to guard against a resurgence of TB. Just 75 years ago, the disease killed nearly 1,000 state residents every year. In 2014, there were three TB-related deaths.

The overall TB crisis continues to increase, particularly as drug-resistant cases rise globally. While considerable work has been done to prevent the spread of TB, fighting it is a long-term commitment that must be met by the public health and health care communities.

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