



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

News Release

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GOVERNOR

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For Immediate Release: March 24, 2008

08-35

**DOH AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS OBSERVE
WORLD TUBERCULOSIS DAY, MARCH 24, 2008**

HONOLULU – The Hawai'i State Department of Health (DOH) today joins others across the nation and the world in observance of World Tuberculosis Day. This annual event commemorates the date in 1882 that Robert Koch announced the discovery of the tuberculosis (TB) bacillus, and raises awareness of TB and the importance of TB control efforts, both in Hawai'i and worldwide.

“Although many people believe that TB is a disease of the past, it is still a leading killer among infectious diseases worldwide. We continue to be vigilant about TB control in Hawai'i,” stated Dr. Jessie Wing, DOH tuberculosis control program chief and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) medical officer. “In the past year, our tuberculosis control staff investigated active TB cases on ships, planes and in schools. In some cases, we had staff working around the clock to expedite the screening of hundreds of individuals.”

DOH has taken a number of steps to meet the wide array of challenges presented by the fact that Hawai'i has one of the highest TB case rates in the nation.

- Purchased a new mobile x-Ray unit to help screen more at-risk populations in communities around the island, at large off-site screenings and additional community outreach activities.
- Trained and updated tuberculosis control staff skills using the latest Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines.
- Strengthened partnerships with the Department of Education for coordinated screening of students and school staff.

Additionally, DOH is working to update Hawai'i's administrative rules to include new blood tests for TB infection, screening based on risk assessment and review of public health law for persons with active TB who pose a threat to public health.

“As Hawai'i observes World Tuberculosis Day, we recognize the patients and health care workers who work every day to prevent and control TB, as well as the collective efforts of our community partners in tuberculosis control,” Director of Health Chiyome Fukino, M.D., stated. “We look forward to developing these partnerships more fully in the next few years and to continuing to work together towards the eventual elimination of this disease.”

Tuberculosis is a disease that most commonly affects the lungs and can be spread from person-to-person. When a person with active TB disease in the lung or throat coughs, sneezes, speaks, or sings, tiny drops containing *M. tuberculosis* may be spread into the air. If another person inhales these drops there is a chance that they will become infected with TB. Two forms of TB exist, both of which are treatable and curable:

1. Latent TB infection – a person has TB bacteria in their body but the body's immune system is protecting them and they are not and do not feel sick. A person with latent TB infection cannot spread the infection to other people.
2. Active TB disease – a person becomes sick with TB because their immune system can no longer protect them and they often have symptoms and signs of disease. A person with active TB disease may be able to spread the disease to other people.

Free screening for persons at high-risk of TB (persons with diabetes, HIV/AIDS, travel from countries with high prevalence of TB, etc.) will be offered at Lanakila Health Center during Public Health Week, April 7-13, 2008. For more information on the free screening or tuberculosis, please call the Department of Health Tuberculosis Control Program at 832-5731 or visit the Department of Health Web site at www.hawaii.gov/health/tb.

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