Cabinet For Health Services
STATEWIDE NEWS RELEASE

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Kentucky's Tuberculosis Rate Reaches Historic Low

FRANKFORT, Ky. (March 19, 2001) - Kentucky public health officials have some good news to report with World TB Day coming up on March 24: Kentucky's tuberculosis rate reached an historic low for the year 2000.

The state rate for 2000 was 3.7 cases per 100,000 residents. There were 147 reported cases last year, compared to 209 for the previous year (1999).

Tuberculosis continues to kill more people worldwide each year than any other infectious disease, according to Dr. Glyn Caldwell, the state's epidemiologist. Although TB cases have decreased in the U.S. in recent years, it is still a serious threat to public health in much of the world and in the United States.

Kentucky has come a long way in fighting TB. In 1910, TB killed 5,230 people in Kentucky. During the year 2000 there were five TB deaths.

World TB Day marks the date when German physician Robert Koch first announced his discovery of the organism that caused Tuberculosis in 1882.

"Kentucky can be proud of their health professionals and the job that is being done to make the communities aware of TB," said Linda Jackson, manager of the state Tuberculosis Program in the Department for Public Health. "Local health department staff, providing directly observed therapy and follow-up for those infected with the bacterium, have had a positive impact in controlling TB in Kentucky. However, the battle is far from over."

Across the United States, the HIV epidemic contributed substantially to the increased numbers of TB cases in the late 1980's and early 1990's. Activities to control and eliminate TB in the United States must include aggressive efforts to identify HIV-infected persons with the latent TB infection and to provide them with therapy to prevent progression to active TB disease.

People who should be tested for TB include: people with or at risk for HIV infection, people in close contact with those with infectious TB, people with certain chronic diseases such as diabetes, people who inject drugs, foreign-born people from areas where TB is common, medically underserved low-income populations including high risk racial and ethnic groups, residents of long-term care facilities, and locally identified high-prevalence groups (for example, migrant farm workers or homeless persons), according to Donna Perkins, a nurse consultant with the state Tuberculosis Control program.

(more)

Here are statistics for Kentucky TB cases since 1990:

Year	Cases	Year	Cases
1990	361	1996	259
1991	347	1997	199
1992	402	1998	179
1993	404	1999	209
1994	347	2000	147
1995	327		

Here are some TB facts:

What is TB and what does it do to your body?

- "TB" is short for a disease called tuberculosis. Tiny bacteria or germs that can float in the air spread TB. The TB germs may spray into the air if a person with **TB disease** of the lungs or throat coughs, shouts, or sneezes. Anyone nearby can breathe TB germs into their lungs.
- The germ can live in your body without making you sick. This is called **TB infection**. Your immune system traps TB germs with special germ fighters. Your germ fighters keep TB germs from making you sick.
- Sometimes the TB germs can break away and spread. Then they cause **TB disease**. The germs can attack the lungs or other parts of the body. They can go to the kidneys, the brain, or the spine. If people have **TB disease**, they need medical help. If they don't get help, they can die.

How do I know if I have TB infection?

- A skin test is the only way to tell if you have **TB infection**. The test is "**positive**" if a bump about the size of a pencil eraser or bigger appears on your arm. This bump means you probably have **TB infection**.

What should I do if I have TB infection?

- See your family doctor or make an appointment to be screened by the TB program at your local health department.
- If you have **TB infection**, you may need treatment so you will not get **TB disease** later. This is called "preventive" treatment. Isoniazid (INH) is the anti-TB drug used most often.

What happens if TB goes untreated?

- Unless you get preventive therapy treatment, **TB infection** can turn into **TB disease**. Those who are more likely to get sick from **TB disease** include:
  - Alcoholics or injection drug users.
  - People with certain medical conditions such as diabetes and certain types of cancers.
  - People with HIV infection (the virus that causes AIDS).
- These things make your body less able to fight TB germs and TB infection can then become TB disease.
- It is very important that you take the preventive therapy as your doctor or clinic recommends. It takes at least six months to a year to kill all the TB germs. Remember that you will always have TB germs in your body unless you kill them with the right medicine.

For more information, call your local health department or the state Tuberculosis Control Program (502) 564-4276.