



March 21, 2013

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World TB Day reminds us to remain vigilant

On World Tuberculosis Day, March 24, the Kane County Health Department is reminding people that, although the illness is not as common as it once was, it is still circulating around the world.

World TB Day commemorates the day in 1882 when Dr. Robert Koch announced his discovery of the bacteria that causes TB, *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. TB has been a scourge across human history, and the discovery of the causative agent by Dr. Koch began the modern public health efforts to control and now, eliminate, TB.

The Kane County Health Department has been battling an outbreak of TB at a local homeless shelter since 2007. While TB cases statewide in Illinois have reached record lows, a total of 45 cases of active TB have been linked to the shelter outbreak. Health Department nurses visit the shelter daily as the investigation continues.

Tuberculosis is a contagious and potentially life-threatening disease that is transmitted from person to person through the air when a person with active TB coughs or sneezes. While it can affect any part of the body, such as the brain, kidneys or spine, tuberculosis usually affects the lungs. General symptoms may include fatigue, weight loss, fever and night sweats. When tuberculosis attacks the lungs, symptoms can include a persistent cough that sometimes produces blood and chest pains.

While tuberculosis is usually curable, a person with the disease must faithfully adhere to prescribed drug therapy for six months or longer. Many patients comply with the strict drug regimen at first, but some stop taking their anti-TB medication after they start to feel better. Failure to follow the therapy for the full length of time prescribed may allow the tuberculosis to return. In some cases, the re-established infection cannot be treated with the usual antibiotics.

(MORE)

Drug-resistant tuberculosis (TB) is on the rise globally. In some areas of the world, one in four people with tuberculosis becomes ill with a form of the disease that can no longer be treated with standard drugs regimens, a World Health Organization (WHO) report says.

Overall, the number of cases in Illinois continues to decline. In 2012, 347 cases of active tuberculosis were reported in Illinois, a decrease from 359 in 2011. The record low number of cases in Illinois can largely be attributed to Directly Observed Therapy, a program to make sure those with TB complete their full medication regimen, as well as identifying those who have had contact with someone with TB and treating them for latent tuberculosis infection.

More information about TB can be found by visiting the Health Department's Web site at www.kanehealth.com/tuberculosis.htm.

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