NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
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Commissioner

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HEALTH DEPARTMENT HONORS WORLD TUBERCULOSIS DAY: 5% DECREASE IN CASES SINCE 2019

Tuberculosis and COVID-19 can present with similar symptoms – get tested if you have a fever and prolonged cough

March 24, 2022 – The Health Department today released a new summary of data on Tuberculosis (TB) cases in New York City in recognition of World TB Day. New data show a 5% decrease in the number of people diagnosed with TB since 2019 [530 diagnosed with TB in 2021 compared to 566 in 2019]. In 2021, 88 percent of people with TB in NYC were born outside of the U.S. In addition, 71 percent of US-born persons with TB were non-Hispanic Black or Hispanic/Latino. Eleven percent of persons diagnosed with TB died before or during treatment. TB is the second leading infectious killer in the world, after COVID-19. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), nearly 1.5 million people died due to TB in 2020.

"TB is a global health issue that has real world implications in our communities," said **Health Commissioner Dr. Ashwin Vasan**. "In NYC, TB diagnoses are linked to racism and inequity, which is why it is crucial to advance equitable, evidence-based care for people at risk for and that have developed active TB. If you've spent time with someone with diagnosed TB or have a cough lasting more than three weeks, speak to your health care provider about getting tested immediately."

"Throughout the pandemic, TB was diagnosed in every NYC neighborhood," said **Dr. Joseph Burzynski, Assistant Commissioner for the Bureau of Tuberculosis Control**. "COVID-19 and TB can present with similar symptoms, such as fever and cough. If a person has a prolonged cough or has spent time around someone with TB, they should be tested for TB in addition to COVID-19."

In 2021, the Health Department continued to move toward a more patient-centered approach to TB care. These efforts included:

- Expanded telehealth services for patients and their families with home visits as needed,
- Expanding video access to health care workers to promote adherence to therapies,
- Use whole genome sequencing and other molecular tests to more rapidly diagnose TB, detect outbreaks, and identify drug resistance to ensure that patients are placed on appropriate treatment sooner.
- Continued targeted outreach, education, and TB testing in high-risk populations

- Reinforced messaging about the 2019 Health Code change requiring laboratory reporting of results of blood-based tests for TB infection.
- The Health Department also released a City Health Information clinical bulletin to over 40,000 NYC providers to provide programmatic information and clinical guidance on the diagnosis and treatment of TB infection.

The Health Department continues to provide effective and patient-centered TB care and treatment. The Health Department offers free medical care for TB-related conditions at our TB Chest Centers, with multilingual staff. The Health Department Clinics provide confidential TB testing, treatment, and care at three clinics located in the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens. Health Department clinic services are available regardless of immigration or insurance status.

Additional Data Highlights

- Of the five New York City boroughs, Queens continued to have the highest number of persons diagnosed with TB, accounting for 43 percent of all new cases in 2021
- West Queens, Queens had the highest rate among all neighborhoods at 18.1 per 100,000 which was three times higher than the citywide rate
- No TB was diagnosed in children younger than 5 years of age.
- Seven patients diagnosed in 2021 had a multidrug-resistant TB strain

World TB Day Event

In observance of World TB Day, on Friday, March 18th, the Health Department co-sponsored a virtual conference, with local, national, and global updates on TB. The theme of the conference was "Reimagining TB Elimination: Lessons Learned from the COVID-19 Response." The conference was jointly hosted by the Global Tuberculosis Institute at Rutgers University, the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and the Center for Continuing & Outreach Education at Rutgers Biomedical Health Sciences. The conference was attended by nearly 350 local, national and international stakeholders.

About Tuberculosis

Tuberculosis, or TB, is a disease caused by the bacterium *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. With proper diagnosis and treatment, TB can be prevented and cured. There are two forms of TB: TB infection and TB disease. TB infection means that TB bacteria are living in the body, but not causing any symptoms. People with TB infection do not feel sick and cannot spread the disease, but TB infection can be treated to prevent progression to TB disease. Multi-drug resistant (MDR) TB remains a public health crisis: globally only 1 in 3 people diagnosed with MDR-TB accessed treatment in 2020 according to WHO data. Symptoms of TB disease may include weight loss, a persistent cough lasting longer than three weeks, chest pain, coughing up blood or phlegm, loss of appetite, chills, fever or night sweats.

When a person who is sick with TB disease coughs, sneezes, or engages in other activities, like singing, they put TB germs in the air. People usually get TB germs in their bodies only when they spend a long time around someone who is sick with TB. Brief contact (such as on trains or buses) with people who are sick with TB is unlikely to spread TB. TB is not spread by shaking hands, sharing food, or through sexual activity. Most people do not know they have TB until

they become sick. That is why it is critical for people at high risk for TB to get tested. People who are at risk include individuals who have spent time around someone with active TB disease, who were born, traveled, or lived in a country with high rates of TB, or persons with medical conditions that weaken the immune system. People who have TB infection can be treated to prevent them from developing active disease. People with active TB disease can be treated and cured through a combination of antibiotics.

Find out if you are at risk for TB by taking our TB Risk Assessment at nyc.gov/health/tb.

For more information, call 311 or visit nyc.gov and search "TB".

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