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Department of Health: Drug-Resistant Tuberculosis a Rising Concern

Pennsylvania Health Secretary Everette James recently stressed the importance of increasing awareness of tuberculosis, or TB, and continuing efforts to control the infectious airborne disease that killed nearly 2 million people in 2008.

"Better identification, investigation and treatment of the disease have contributed to a significant decrease in the number of TB cases reported in Pennsylvania during the past decade," said James. "However, we are seeing more cases of TB that are resistant to medication, which makes the disease more difficult and costly to treat."

The number of reported TB cases in Pennsylvania fell from 447 in 1998 to 236 in 2009; a 47-percent drop. However, 9.3 percent of TB cases tested in 2009 were resistant to at least one traditional treatment medication.

Tuberculosis is an airborne disease caused by bacteria. It usually affects the lungs but it may seriously damage other parts of the body as well. Individuals can become infected when a person with pulmonary TB disease coughs, sneezes, or speaks, sending bacteria into the air. Signs and symptoms of the disease include cough, fever, night sweats, loss of appetite, weight loss and fatigue.

Although TB rates are relatively low in North America and Europe, the disease remains a serious problem in less-developed regions. Globally, the disease killed an estimated 1.8 million people in 2008.

For more information on tuberculosis, visit the Department of Health Web site at www.health.state.pa.us/tb. For information on World TB Day, visit www.stoptb.org.

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