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Health Department Announces Lowest Number of Tuberculosis Cases in Baltimore History

Baltimore, MD (March 24, 2009) – Mayor Sheila Dixon joined Commissioner Sharfstein and Gregory Schaffer, President of the Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center, to commemorate World TB Day. World TB Day is aimed at raising awareness of the risks associated with tuberculosis and reducing the spread of this potentially deadly disease.

“The historic reduction in the City’s tuberculosis rate is a substantial decrease and a great milestone for the City of Baltimore,” said Mayor Dixon. “This could not have been accomplished without the dedicated and hard-working staff at the Health Department’s TB Control Program. I commend them for their commitment to making Baltimore a healthier city.”

In 2008, Baltimore reported the lowest number of cases in the city’s history – 32 cases – with an incidence rate of 5.0 per 100,000. This is a decrease 32 percent from 2007, when the number of reported TB cases was 47 and the TB case rate was 7.4.

Tuberculosis (TB) is an infectious disease that is spread from person-to-person through the air. TB is curable and preventable. When a person sick with TB coughs, sneezes, or sings, another person may breathe in the TB bacteria and, in some cases, become sick and infectious to others. Symptoms of TB can include a persistent, productive cough of several weeks, tiredness, weakness, loss of appetite, fever, night sweats, and/or weight loss. Since TB is spread through the air, breathing in the bacteria is the only way to become infected.

TB illness is curable with antibiotics; antibiotics can cure the individual in most cases and prevent transmission to others. TB illness is preventable; people who have breathed in the TB bacteria but who are not yet ill can even take an antibiotic in order to prevent the development of the disease.

Although the number of TB cases fluctuates from year to year, Baltimore City's general trend is downward. Today, there is continued success of TB control in Baltimore City due to an aggressive TB Control Program with a dedicated and hard-working staff. The Health Department's are prompt identification of persons with clinically active TB, appropriate treatment of all TB cases, prompt identification and screening of TB contacts, appropriate provision of treatment of latent TB infection to high-risk reactors, and targeted testing and treatment of latent TB infection to high-risk populations.

For more information about clinical services and World TB Day activities, please contact Sherry Johnson Ketemepi, Acting Assistant Commissioner, at (410) 396-4445 or view our website at www.baltimorehealth.org/tb.

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Please visit our website at www.baltimorecity.gov