



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 24, 2010

World TB Day, March 24

LAS VEGAS – The Southern Nevada Health District will celebrate World TB Day, March 24, with an open house at its renovated TB Treatment and Control Clinic at the main campus, 625 Shadow Lane. The open house includes a tour of the facility as well as a panel discussion with TB staff, clinic clients and family members about how tuberculosis has impacted their lives and families. The health district reminds Valley residents that although TB is not eradicated, it is a curable illness.

As part of World TB Day, the health district posted a video to its YouTube channel about TB's impact on the lives of three patients and their families, www.youtube.com/SNHealthDistrict

Misconceptions about TB continue, especially about how the illness is spread, who contracts it and how it is treated. Each year, the health district conducts about 80 contact investigations triggered by an active case of TB.

“In some countries, TB is still associated with poverty or poor living conditions. During a contact investigation, this can cause anxiety from patients who are reluctant to work with us,” said Bonnie Sorenson, the health district’s director of nursing. “When we notify someone that he or she has been identified as a contact of a TB patient, there is an initial fear and resistance to provide any additional close contacts. The public health nurses take as much time as necessary to alleviate these fears and continue to educate them about the illness, the process, the treatment and the cure.”

TB can infect anyone, regardless of where they live or their socioeconomic status. However, TB disease is much more common in most countries in Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Russia. Nearly 55 percent of local TB patients are foreign born, many from countries where TB infection is widespread. In the US, the number of TB cases continues to decline, however, among foreign born residents, the rate of decline has been slower.

TB can also spread more easily in communal settings such as prisons or jails, homeless shelters and some nursing homes.

“Patients have told us that some of their loneliest times were during a hospital stay. We continue to educate families, friends and even healthcare workers about how TB is spread and what they should and shouldn’t do,” said Laurie Hickstein, senior public health nurse.

After treatment has begun, patients are tested to determine when they are no longer infectious. At that time, they can return to work and must comply with the medication schedule.

“This is always a very satisfying step in a patient’s treatment. They can resume their lives,” said Hickstein.

-more-

World TB Day - add one

The health district treats patients with pulmonary TB (TB in the lungs), but also patients who have TB in their bones, skin or other organs - called extapulmonary TB.

"Many patients who have contracted extapulmonary TB are shocked that you can even get TB in other parts of your body," said Hickstein. "For patients and their families, learning about TB disease and its treatment is like learning a new language. It is a family effort." TB treatment can take six to 24 months or longer if the infection is a drug-resistant strain.

Public health nurses from the health district visit or speak with every active TB patient at least twice a week to ensure treatment compliance and to verify that other needs such as food and shelter are being met. These visits are also part of the "directly observed" therapy protocol. An attending physician meets with adult and pediatric patients periodically throughout their treatment regime.

In 2010, 2 billion people worldwide were affected by tuberculosis, which is about 1/3 of the world's population. In Clark County there were 97 cases in 2010.

World TB Day marks the date in 1882 when Dr. Robert Koch announced that he discovered the bacterium that caused TB.

Updated information about the Southern Nevada Health District can be found on Facebook www.facebook.com/SouthernNevadaHealthDistrict, on YouTube www.youtube.com/SNHealthDistrict or Twitter www.twitter.com/SNHDinfo.