

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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100 YEARS OF TUBERCULOSIS TREATMENT IN VIRGINIA

Virginia Department of Health Recognizes World TB Day and a Century of Services to Virginians

(Richmond, Va.) The fight against tuberculosis (TB) in Virginia began even before the establishment of the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) in 1908. The first sanatorium for treatment of TB in the Commonwealth opened in 1904 at Central State Hospital and three more were opened before 1920. When VDH was created in 1908 the agency had four employees and an annual budget of \$40,000. Public health efforts focused primarily on the prevention and control of infectious diseases like tuberculosis. Despite the best efforts of Virginia's public health system over the past century, TB unfortunately remains a significant threat to public health.

"Tuberculosis played a major role in the establishment of the state health department in Virginia and continues to be a concern in our state and around the world," explained State Health Commissioner, Karen Remley, M.D., M.B.A., F.A.A.P. "Despite recent progress, TB remains a considerable global public health concern, with nearly nine-million new cases and more than a million-and-a-half deaths each year."

The earliest statistics of TB cases in Virginia dates back to 1910 when 5,858 cases were reported. That is the highest number of cases ever reported in the Commonwealth. Since then TB case numbers have declined. In 2007 there were 309 cases reported. "Improved diagnosis and the introduction of effective drug therapy have significantly influenced the reduction in TB cases," explained Margaret Tipple, M.D., director of the VDH Tuberculosis Control Program in the Division of Disease Prevention. "However, recent reports of drug resistant TB are a reminder of how resilient the disease can be and how critical it is that we maintain our public health infrastructure."

Tuberculosis is an infectious bacterial disease caused by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, which most commonly affects the lungs but can also occur anywhere in the

body. It is transmitted from person to person when someone with active TB disease coughs producing infectious airborne droplets which are inhaled by a susceptible person. In most people, infection with *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* causes no symptoms, since the person's immune system acts to “wall off” the bacteria. This is called latent infection. People with latent TB infection cannot transmit the infection to others. The symptoms of active TB disease of the lung are coughing, sometimes with sputum or blood, chest pains, tiredness, weight loss, fever and night sweats. Active tuberculosis is treatable with medications, but requires that several medications be given over several months to more than a year.

Anyone can get TB. “TB was one of the reasons a public health department was established in Virginia one hundred years ago and this disease hasn’t gone away,” Remley said. “To conquer TB we must continue to educate health care providers and the public, search for better medications to treat the disease and support our local health departments’ efforts to eliminate this disease in their communities.”

For more information about TB in Virginia go to www.vdh.virginia.gov

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