



World Tuberculosis (TB) Day 2010

The Irish Thoracic Society (ITS) urges against complacency in the fight against Tuberculosis (TB) - a contagious but preventable disease with rising case numbers, that continues to pose significant public health challenges in Ireland.

To mark World TB Day, 24th March, the ITS has identified a number of principles that are central to tackling TB:

TB is a preventable disease – prevention is key. This is achieved through screening high risk groups and treating them for latent TB before the active infection develops.

Ensure patients follow and complete treatment to avoid recurrence and spread of TB. High rates of treatment failure are a serious issue in the management of TB and can be avoided through directly observed therapy (DOT) where patients are assigned a healthcare professional to monitor their treatment and ensure compliance.

Control the spread of multi-drug resistant TB (MDR-TB). This is a form of TB that fails to respond to standard first-line drugs and is therefore difficult and expensive to treat. Although cases of MDR-TB have been few in Ireland, it is an increasing threat worldwide and is likely to become more common in Ireland.

Foster research as a central component in the fight against TB. Ireland is already making inroads in this regard. Work in TB immunology carried out in St James's Hospital has led to changes in global TB practice by identifying a side effect of a new group of drugs (TNF blockers) that cause TB to reactivate.

Equip healthcare professionals to face the challenges of TB through education.

Significant training and education is necessary to deal with emerging issues such as latent TB infection (LTBI) in at-risk populations and multiple drug resistant tuberculosis disease.

"TB has not gone away. Its contagious nature means that communities are vulnerable if the proper safeguards are not in place. However the fact that it is preventable means that communities should reasonably expect to be protected from the disease. Preventative measures such as screening of high risk groups will reap long-term public health and cost gains and should be introduced without delay." Said Dr Terry O'Connor, President of the Irish Thoracic Society.

Ends

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Facts about TB

1. Tuberculosis (TB) is contagious and spreads through the air. A person with infectious TB can expel TB germs into the air when they cough, sneeze, laugh, or even sing. People in the surrounding area can then inhale these TB germs. If not treated, each person with active TB can infect on average 10 to 15 people a year.
2. In 2006, 465 cases of TB (11 per 100,000 population) were notified to the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HSPC). This marked an increase on the rates reported between 2000 and 2005, which ranged from 9.7 to 10.6 per 100,000 population.¹
3. This recent increase in the epidemic follows more than half a century of declining TB rates, from almost 7000 cases in the early 1950s to approximately 400 at the turn of the millennium.
4. 41 people died from TB in Ireland in 2006.²
5. More than two billion people, equal to one third of the world's total population, are infected with TB bacilli, the microbes that cause TB. One in every 10 of those people will become sick with active TB in his or her lifetime. People living with HIV are at a much greater risk.³
6. Worldwide, a total of 1.8 million people died from TB in 2008 (including 500 000 people with HIV). TB is a disease of poverty, affecting mostly young adults in their most productive years and women in their childbearing years. The vast majority of TB deaths are in the developing world, with more than half occurring in Asia.³
7. Multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB) is a form of TB that does not respond to the standard treatments using first-line drugs. There were an estimated 500,000 new MDR-TB cases in 2007 with three countries accounting for 56% of all cases globally: China, India and the Russian Federation.³
8. Extensively drug-resistant TB (XDR-TB) occurs when resistance to second-line drugs develops. It is extremely difficult to treat and cases have been confirmed in 57 countries. We have had a case in Ireland.

References:

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3. World Health Organisation (WHO)
www.who.int/tb/publications/2009/tbfactsheet_2009update_one_page.pdf