



Media Release

For more information: Ed Barham, Office of Communications 501-280-4147 or Ann Wright, Office of Communications 501-661-2474

For Immediate Release
February 8, 2008

Health Department Update on Tuberculosis and Hansen's Disease in Northwest Arkansas

(Little Rock--) The Arkansas Department of Health (ADH) is receiving reports from concerned citizens about a possible outbreak of 300 plus cases of tuberculosis (Tb) and an outbreak of Hansen's Disease (leprosy) in Benton, Washington and Sebastian counties). **There are no outbreaks of either disease in the state.**

The total number of cases of tuberculosis statewide for 2007 was 106. The total number of current cases of TB in northwest Arkansas (Benton, Washington and Sebastian counties) is 21. These cases are under treatment, and the general public is not at risk. The total number of cases of Hansen's Disease in the northwest area (Benton, Washington and Sebastian counties) is nine. These cases are not recent infections.

Tuberculosis is a disease that affects the lungs, but it can affect virtually any part of the body. It is spread through the air by people who are sick with disease in their lungs, but not by those with only a positive skin test. It ordinarily takes prolonged or repeated exposure for a person to get infected. Practically all transmission of TB takes place before the person with TB is identified as being sick. Once identified, the patient is started on medication and rapidly is no longer contagious. Because of this, once the case of TB is recognized, danger of transmission is past.

Treatment with modern drugs is very effective. Almost everyone who has proper treatment gets well. Most people who do not get well are people who are very sick with other serious illnesses.

Skin testing is part of a contact investigation, a routine procedure followed by the TB program at the Department of Health. We skin test people who may have been exposed to a person with TB and are possibly at risk of getting the infection.

A positive skin test does not mean a person has active TB – only the presence of latent infection (the germ is present in the body but not causing disease). In such cases, the individual is not contagious (he/she cannot spread the disease to others).

Hansen's Disease (leprosy) is an infectious disease that usually affects the skin, nerves and mucous membranes. It is **not** a disease that is easily spread. **Ninety-five percent of**

the human population is genetically resistant to the disease (they cannot contract the disease).

Persons receiving antibiotic treatment or having completed treatment are considered free of active infection. Although the way in which Hansen's Disease is transmitted remains uncertain, most investigators think it is spread through respiratory droplets.

For more information click on <http://www.cdc.gov/tb> and http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/hansens_t.htm .

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