



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

**News Release**

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**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH OBSERVES  
WORLD TUBERCULOSIS DAY ON MARCH 24, 2009**

HONOLULU – The Hawai'i State Department of Health (DOH) joins others across the nation and the world to observe *World Tuberculosis Day* on March 24, 2009. On this day in 1882, Robert Koch announced the discovery of the tuberculosis (TB) bacillus. Although many people believe that TB is a disease of the past, it is still common among infectious diseases in many other countries. The global effort to control TB is important for TB control nationally.

TB is a disease that is commonly seen in the lungs and can be spread from person-to-person through the air. When a person with active TB disease in the lung or throat coughs, sneezes, speaks, or sings, tiny drops containing TB bacteria may be spread into the air. If another person inhales these droplets, there is a chance that they will become infected with TB. Two forms of TB exist, both of which are treatable and curable:

1. Latent TB infection – when a person has TB bacteria in their body but the body's immune system is protecting them and they are not sick. Someone with latent TB infection cannot spread the infection to other people.
2. Active TB disease – when a person becomes sick with TB because their immune system can no longer protect them. Someone with active TB disease may be able to spread the disease to other people.

While TB has been decreasing overall in the U.S., the proportion of cases among people born in other countries where TB is still common is increasing.

**(more)**

Hawai'i has the highest TB case rate in the nation, with a rate of 9.6 cases per 100,000 people. That rate is twice the U.S. average. Yet Hawai'i ranks in the middle in total numbers of cases, due to its smaller population compared with states like New York, California and Texas. In 2008, 124 cases of active TB were reported in Hawai'i with most of the cases reported on O'ahu. Of the state's new TB cases, 88.7 percent were foreign-born. The vast majority of these people had latent TB that developed into active TB later on.

Last year, Hawai'i State Department of Health (DOH) clinics placed and read over 55,000 tuberculin skin tests statewide; among these, 8.3 percent were positive. Most of these persons had latent TB infection and were offered treatment with 9 months of antibiotics to prevent progression to active TB disease.

For more information on tuberculosis, please call the DOH Tuberculosis Control Program at 832-5731 or visit the Department of Health Web site at [www.hawaii.gov/health/tb](http://www.hawaii.gov/health/tb).

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