

Statement of Bernadette Toomey
President and Chief Executive Officer
on
World TB Day
March 24, 2008

Initially founded to combat tuberculosis (TB) more than a century ago, the American Lung Association today urges Congress to act decisively to finally eliminate TB in America. The Comprehensive TB Elimination Act, S. 1551/HR 1532, now pending in the Congress, would propel the U.S. Public Health Service's efforts and lead international work to eradicate the infection globally. It is imperative that our nation prepare for a potential outbreak because extensively drug-resistant (XDR-TB), which is very difficult to treat, has been identified in the U.S.

We stand on the brink of being able to eliminate TB in this country, but we are starving for new tools to effectively prevent, diagnose and treat TB to deal with a potential resurgence. Many older Americans remember when TB was rampant. Although treatment breakthroughs dramatically curtailed the disease in the U.S., TB continues to pose a threat to our public health; 10 to 15 million Americans are infected with latent TB. Worldwide, there were 9.2 million new cases of TB and 1.7 million deaths (approximately 4700 per day) from TB in 2006. Drug-resistant strains of TB are spreading globally, including extensively drug-resistant TB (XDR-TB), and raising concerns of a future epidemic of virtually untreatable TB.

Astonishingly, in our age of high-tech medicine, we use antiquated diagnostic methods that fail to adequately detect TB in children and those co-infected with HIV/AIDS. The newest class of anti-TB drugs is more than 40 years old. America's commitment to TB has stalled at a time when we face critical threats.

The Comprehensive TB Elimination Act will: expand CDC-sponsored research on the safety and efficacy of new drugs, diagnostics and vaccines, and studies of populations at risk for TB; authorize and expand CDC demonstration activities on TB elimination, including targeted efforts to prevent, detect and treat the disease among Asians and foreign-born persons in the U.S.; expand research, including study of the relationship between TB and HIV/AIDS, and research training programs at the NIH; and authorize funding for the "Blueprint Plan for TB Vaccine Development".

As we mark World TB Day, the American Lung Association continues to fight for a high level of commitment and funding to protect Americans from TB. Congress and the President should move quickly to ensure the Comprehensive TB Elimination Act becomes law.

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