



Robert P. Astorino, Westchester County Executive

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **TUBERCULOSIS CASES ARE DOWN**

#### **But Westchester has 3 multi-drug-resistant cases**

Tomorrow is World Tuberculosis Day, which marks the day in 1882 when microbiologist Robert Koch announced he had discovered the bacteria that causes tuberculosis. More than two billion people – one third of the world’s population – are infected with tuberculosis. One in 10 of those infected will become sick with active TB in his or her lifetime, according to the World Health Organization. If untreated, each person with active TB can infect, on average , 10 to 15 people a year. In the U.S., 12,904 cases of TB were reported in 2008, and 644 people died of TB in 2006, the most recent data available.

In Westchester, the county health department closely monitors tuberculosis. In 2009, 40 Westchester residents had tuberculosis, down from 62 in 2008. In New York State, Westchester County has the second highest number of residents with TB and the fourth highest case rate of TB outside New York City. Westchester residents diagnosed with TB come from a diverse range of ethnic, racial and socioeconomic backgrounds and have included young children and students, retail store and restaurant workers, housekeepers and people employed in schools and in health care.

“While we are pleased that our overall caseload is down, it is worth noting that we have 3 residents currently being treated for multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis in Westchester, while there were only 107 such cases nationwide in 2008,” said Dr. Cheryl Archbald, acting commissioner of health.

Two of the three Westchester residents with multi-drug resistant TB (MDR-TB) were born in the U.S., in contrast to the vast majority nationwide who are foreign-born.

MDR-TB can develop in an individual diagnosed with TB who does not consistently take the required medications. An individual with MDR-TB can spread the infection to others. People with MDR-TB require a more extensive medication regimen and follow-up medical management. They must be actively treated for about two years and must be monitored for another two years afterwards.

**More**

Tuberculosis is a disease caused by a bacterium that is usually spread when an infected person coughs. TB usually infects the lungs, but it can also affect other parts of the body. Symptoms can include weakness, fatigue, nausea, weight loss, fever and night sweats. Persistent coughing, chest pain or coughing up blood might be symptoms of TB of the lungs. If left untreated, TB can be fatal.

Because TB is relatively uncommon in the U.S., there is often a delay in diagnosing and treating the disease. During this delay, the infection can spread to others. People who are exposed to someone with active tuberculosis generally do not become ill immediately. This stage is called latent infection and it could take months or years before the infection spreads inside the body and causes illness (active TB). If treated during the early stages, such illness can be avoided.

Through its TB clinics, the Westchester County Department of Health provides free medical care and medications to residents with active TB. The Health Department also follows up with residents with active TB being managed by other healthcare providers in the County to ensure that all patients are appropriately treated to decrease the likelihood of spreading the infection to others.

The Health Department makes sure that individuals with active TB do not go to work, attend school or go to other places where they may spread the infection to others and also conducts directly observed therapy to ensure that individuals with TB are compliant with their medications. In 2009, Health Department staff made approximately 7000 visits to the 40 individuals with tuberculosis to observe them taking their medications and to provide additional education to prevent disease transmission.

People exposed to individuals with active TB also require special management and treatment. In 2009, the Health Department was involved in 39 contact investigations through which close to 800 people potentially exposed to an infectious TB case at workplaces, schools, healthcare facilities and social and faith-based settings were identified in need of evaluation.

For more information about tuberculosis, call the Westchester County Department of Health at (914) 813-5000 or visit the Health Department website at [www.westchestergov.com/health](http://www.westchestergov.com/health).