



News Release

PUBLIC HEALTH LABORATORY SERVICE

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World TB Day – March 24th

World TB Day 2002, is focussing on the link between TB and poverty. Worldwide, tuberculosis is a disease that disproportionately affects the poor, and this year's theme set by the WHO Stop TB Initiative, aims to tackle the disease by targeting poverty, increasing awareness and improving access to treatment.

Professor Brian Duerden, Medical Director at PHLS said, “The PHLS welcomes such initiatives to tackle tuberculosis. This is a disease that continues to be a significant public health problem for developed and developing countries alike. Many people think of TB as a disease of Victorian times, however we still see worrying numbers of new diagnoses each year in England and Wales. A provisional number of 6838 cases was reported last year, compared to 6572 in the year 2000. The PHLS has a number of new and ongoing initiatives aimed at reducing the burden of this disease:

- “The key to understanding the spread of TB is surveillance, and in 1999 we introduced an Enhanced Surveillance Programme to provide us with more details about the spread of TB, such as demographic, ethnic and microbiological information. This enables us to detect and understand trends in the spread of TB and work towards its control”

“As part of Enhanced Surveillance, the outcome of patients' treatment is also being monitored for the first time. *TB Treatment Outcomes Surveillance*, which started in January 2002, asks clinicians to report on a case 12 months after diagnosis. By monitoring the outcome of individual patients treatment, we gain a valuable insight into the proportion of patients who successfully complete their prescribed treatment; who experience complications leading to longer treatment times and changes in their treatment; patients who are lost to follow-up prior to finishing treatment; or patients who die. This data will be influential in helping us to determine the effectiveness of the national effort to combat TB”

- Professor Frances Drobniowski, Director of the Mycobacterium Reference Unit at the PHLS said “One factor driving the spread of TB in developed countries is migration; and the data from Enhanced Surveillance shows us that 63% of TB cases in the year 2000 were in people born overseas. It is therefore important for the work of the PHLS to have an international dimension and to understand the picture in other countries. The Mycobacterium Reference Unit has been involved in a DfID funded project in Russia to gain an understanding of the spread of TB there and its drug resistance patterns. The project also aims to identify the resources needed such as training and equipment to tackle TB.

- “Understanding the level and patterns of drug resistance is also essential in controlling the spread of TB. Only a small proportion of TB in this country is drug resistant, however it is essential to identify this resistance early on so that patients can be prescribed the most effective treatment. The PHLS has developed a range of tests for use in its specialist TB labs that can establish resistance in a matter of hours, rather than days”

Professor Duerden concludes ‘Higher TB rates in the UK are found in areas of greater deprivation, however more research is needed to fully understand the relationship between TB and poverty in the UK’.

The PHLS website includes two new publications for World TB Day:

- Information leaflet for people suffering from TB (in 7 different languages)
- World TB Day newsletter.

For further information please contact the PHLS press office on 0208 358 3002/3004