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Media note: A fact sheet on Tuberculosis including local trend data is provided on the attached PDF document.

Everyone has a role to play in controlling the spread of TB

The Sarasota County Health Department will join in the World TB Day observance on Monday, Mar. 24. The World Health Organization (WHO) theme, "I Am Stopping TB" is meant to engage people everywhere in the global fight against TB. The focus is on celebrating the lives and stories of people who have effectively been cured of TB by taking daily medication regimens over a prolonged period of time to treat the disease as well as the nurses, doctors, researchers, and public health staff who work daily to stop the spread of TB in the community. Everyone is encouraged to learn more about TB which affects people in the prime of life, ages 25-44. Those who usually become ill from TB are for example, homeless persons, those living in overcrowded poorly ventilated conditions, those living with compromised immune systems and HIV infection and residents who emigrated from countries where TB is common.

Public Health officials who routinely follow TB disease report that risk occurs only when there is prolonged contact with a contagious person in a poorly ventilated area. TB is spread through the air from one person to another, usually when a person with active TB disease coughs or sneezes, in such conditions. People may breathe in these bacteria and develop latent or dormant TB infection. There are an estimated 10 – 15 million Americans infected with the TB bacteria, with the potential to develop active TB disease in the future.

There are medications that can prevent latent TB infection from progressing to active TB disease, as well as to cure people who are sick with the disease. Perhaps the most important measure to control TB is one of the simplest - Directly Observed Therapy (DOT). DOT uses trained personnel who meet with people infected with TB and observe them taking their medication for the duration of treatment, which can extend over six months or longer. DOT is extremely cost-effective in that it does not require hospitalization; 95 percent of those who participate in DOT are cured.

The Sarasota County Health Department's Disease Intervention Services Unit has provided case management to thirteen cases of TB in the past year. None of the cases were the multi-drug resistant strain of the disease. To raise awareness, TB information will be displayed at the Sarasota County Health Department's Ringling Health Center, 2200 Ringling Boulevard in Sarasota.

Although the number of people affected with TB has been declining throughout Florida, public health officials agree that vigilant monitoring and treatment must continue. Only then will we see real progress in the fight against TB. In Sarasota County, the challenge is controlling TB in the most difficult-to-reach people such as those with compromised immune systems, homeless individuals, immigrants and refugees from countries where TB is prevalent.

For more information on TB, please call the Sarasota County Health Department's Disease Intervention Services Office, 941-861-2873 or visit the health department's website: www.sarasotahealth.org or the Centers for Disease Control Division of Tuberculosis Elimination website at: www.cdc.gov/nchstp/tb/.

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