

Arkansas Takes Steps to Combat Tuberculosis

By changing administrative rules on mandatory TB testing and implementing TB blood testing as well as a new latent TB regimen, Arkansas is better targeting its high-risk populations.

Beginning in July 2012, the Arkansas Department of Health (ADH) implemented improved tuberculosis (TB) testing and treatment recommendations based on CDC guidelines. Because tuberculin skin testing produced too many false positives (the groups being tested hadn't had an actual positive case in decades), ADH began using blood testing to improve the result rates. Furthermore, Arkansas legislators approved new administrative rules that ended mandatory TB testing for some professions. Finally, to improve treatment, ADH implemented a new latent TB regimen of two pills weekly for 12 weeks, which has a higher completion rate than the previous regimen.

Arkansas has a long history of effectively addressing TB and one of the lowest TB rates in the nation. Its population will benefit further from the new, targeted approach.

Steps Taken:

- ADH changed from tuberculin skin testing to blood testing, which produces more accurate results and can prevent unnecessary treatment for persons who test false-positive. Additionally, the test is only offered now to individuals suspected of having TB, their contacts, and other high-risk persons.
- To further target TB testing, Arkansas legislators recently approved new administrative rules that ended mandatory TB testing for teachers, emergency personnel, day care workers, and foster parents. The rule change went into effect on Jan. 1, 2013.
- Because fewer than 50 percent of Arkansas patients completed the old regimen of a daily pill for nine months (15 percent below the national figure), a regimen requiring two pills weekly for 12 weeks was implemented.

Arkansas' new latent TB treatment has a nearly 90 percent completion rate compared to the previous regimen's rate of 50 percent.

Results:

- The new latent TB regimen of two pills weekly for 12 weeks has a nearly 90 percent completion rate and provides a new alternative for successful treatment of patients.
- The Arkansas State Board of Health continues to have the authority to resume mandatory testing for the now-exempt groups if a TB outbreak occurs.

Lessons Learned:

- Mandatory annual TB testing will continue for hospital employees and those at other medical facilities, prisons, homeless shelters, and nursing homes. Prisoners and people likely to stay in a homeless shelter for at least 14 days must also be tested. Other groups still required to test for TB include foreign-born students who attend Arkansas universities.



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- Individuals who are or will be employed at hospitals, homeless shelters, or any other organization listed above will now be referred to their employer or another healthcare provider for testing.

For more information:

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