



Arkansas Department of Health

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Governor Asa Hutchinson

Nathaniel Smith, MD, MPH, Director and State Health Officer

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Dear Arkansas Physician:

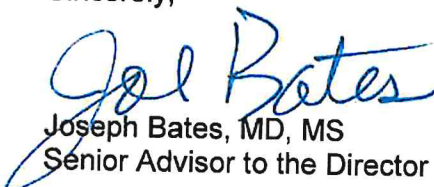
We want to bring to your attention some concerns about tuberculosis control in Arkansas. As many of you know, Arkansas had the highest TB case rate in the nation in the 1950's and 1960's. To solve this major public health problem, the Department of Health worked together with practicing physicians, hospitals and educational institutions to develop an innovative network of chest clinics and hospitals to diagnose and treat TB. This effort was highly successful, and by the 1990's the TB case rate in Arkansas was the same as the U.S. rate. Now over the last decade TB has become an uncommon but not a rare disease in Arkansas.


Our success has brought with it some unwanted problems, and that is why we write to ask for your thoughts and help. In recent years we have registered about 100 new TB cases per year. As we evaluate these new cases, a troubling pattern has emerged. Now more and more of these cases have advanced disease, with positive sputum smears for AFB when first diagnosed. Many of these patients have remained highly infectious for longer intervals than in the past, resulting in more transmission of infection to their contacts. If this trend is not interrupted, the case rate in Arkansas will begin to increase.

We write now to alert you to this unexpected problem in TB control and ask you to consider the diagnosis of tuberculosis in any pneumonia that does not respond promptly to initial treatment. We also remind you of the most important risk factors for TB, including being foreign born, having diabetes, being immunosuppressed by concurrent disease or medications and by being frail and/or elderly. We also remind you that about 15% of tuberculosis patients have extra pulmonary disease, and some of these patients will have no lung involvement. Common extra pulmonary sites are lymph nodes, genitourinary organs, weight bearing joints, particularly the vertebrae, hip and knee joint and the meninges.

We thank you for your dedication and hard work to win the fight to control this historic but very current disease.

Sincerely,


Joseph Bates, MD, MS
Senior Advisor to the Director


Nathaniel Smith, MD, MPH
Director and State Health Officer