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March 24 of each year marks the day in 1882 that Dr. Robert Koch announced his discovery of Mycobacterium tuberculosis, the bacillus that causes TB. Although identified over 135 years ago, TB continues to infect people worldwide and here in Palm Beach County.

Florida Department of Health in Palm Beach County continually monitors and assures treatment for those infected with tuberculosis (TB) in the county. These efforts will one day stop TB here, in Florida and throughout the United States.

For the past 10 years the numbers of people with TB disease has steadily declined. Last year Palm Beach County saw a decline of 17 percent in the number of cases from 2016 with the State of Florida preliminarily showing a 14 percent decline. The goal is to end TB in the United States.

TB in a person is identified as latent TB or TB Disease. Latent TB is when the bacteria lives in a person’s body but is contained. The individual does not feel sick, has no symptoms and cannot spread the disease to others. Many people with latent TB never develop TB disease. But those whose immune system becomes weak for another reason are likely to develop TB disease.

A person with TB disease has a bad cough lasting three weeks or longer, chest pain, coughing up blood or sputum, has weakness or fatigue, weight loss, no appetite, night sweats and is contagious to others they have close contact with. The disease is spread through the droplets generated from the cough to persons who spend many hours with an individual who has TB disease. The treatment for TB includes a regimen of several antibacterial drugs over a course of six to nine months. Failure to complete the course of medication can then lead to a drug resistant strain that may require hospitalization until cured.

Further information on Tuberculosis can be found at www.flhealthpalmbeach.org or www.flhealth.gov.