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USPSTF Recommends TB Screening in Adults at Increased Risk

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 7, 2016 – The National TB Controllers Association (NTCA) and Stop TB USA applaud the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) for its thorough review of the clinical evidence on latent tuberculosis infection (LTBI) and its decision to recommend testing for LTBI among adults at high risk. As stated in the USPSTF Recommendation Statement, treatment of LTBI reduces the risk of active TB disease in people at high risk for infection. [The USPSTF recommends TB screening for adults 18 years of age or older who are at increased risk of tuberculosis \(TB\).](#)

The new USPSTF “B” recommendation for LTBI screening is a major step forward in support of expanded TB testing for people at highest risk. By combining screening with treatment of those infected, active TB could be prevented in the majority of people getting sick with the disease today. The USPSTF recommendations provide an historic opportunity to reduce dramatically the number of people in the U.S. who develop active TB disease, bringing the U.S. closer to our goal of eliminating TB.

The USPSTF recommendation for TB screening provides validation that TB prevention should be a priority for providers and patients. However, prevention cannot stop at screening and confirming LTBI; it must include treatment to prevent TB disease. “With the recent introduction of shorter treatment regimens for LTBI, completing treatment is realistic and more easily accomplished. These regimens, in combination with the evidence-based USPSTF recommendations, give us the best opportunity to eliminate this disease in the U.S.” said Dr. Robert Belknap, Immediate Past President of NTCA.

“We have been very successful in treating people with TB disease in the U.S. However, we also have to address the 13 million people living with latent TB infection in the U.S. and prevent them from developing TB disease in the future. We have the means to diagnose and treat people with LTBI, preventing them from going on to develop TB disease. It is only through prevention that we can eliminate TB in the U.S.,” said Dr. Peter Davidson, current President of NTCA.

In 2015, just over 9,500 people were diagnosed with TB disease in the U.S., however, it is estimated that up to 13 million people in the U.S. have LTBI. People with LTBI are not sick with TB, but they do carry TB bacteria in their bodies, and they could become sick with TB disease in the future and spread the disease to others.

The USPSTF recommends screening for LTBI in “persons who were born, in, or are former residents, of countries with increased tuberculosis prevalence and persons who live in, or have lived in, high-risk congregate settings.” However, the recommendation stops short of identifying ALL high-risk populations because screening for TB in these groups is considered “standard of care as part of disease



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management or should be done prior to the use of certain medications.” These high-risk groups include people living with HIV, close contacts of those with TB disease, and patients being treated with immunosuppressive medications. Unfortunately, not all providers routinely conduct TB screening even in these populations. Delays in diagnosing TB result in worse outcomes for the people affected by the disease and increased transmission to others.

“Health care providers, in partnership with public health departments, can implement the USPSTF recommendations to screen ALL at-risk populations for LTBI, and prioritize which people should be tested and recommended for treatment in order to reduce the impact of TB in communities across the U.S.,” said Dr. Diana Nilsen, President-elect of NTCA.

“Because we have reached an all-time low in active cases of TB in the U.S., it is now imperative that we address the reservoir of infection. All health care providers should consider appropriate identification and treatment of persons infected with TB...as without such treatment, efforts to control and eliminate TB in the U.S. are doomed to failure,” said Dr. Robert Benjamin, Immediate Past Chair of Stop TB USA’s Coordinating Board.

Building on the USPSTF recommendation, NTCA and Stop TB USA recommend testing these groups of individuals at greatest risk of TB:

- (1) Anyone who was born or lived in a country where TB is common. These include most countries other than the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, or most Western and Northern European countries
- (2) Those whose immune system is weakened by a medical condition or medication
- (3) Anyone who is a close contact to someone with infectious TB
- (4) Children with risk for exposure to someone with TB

The California Department of Public Health has developed a simple, yet extremely effective [California Risk Assessment Screening Tool](#) to quickly screen for those individuals who are at greatest risk for developing TB.

It is critically important that health care providers successfully diagnose LTBI. Patients who have a positive TB test result should receive a chest x-ray and additional evaluation to assure that they do not have TB disease. Once LTBI is confirmed, treatment for the infection should be provided.

ABOUT NTCA

NTCA’s mission is to protect the public’s health by advancing the elimination of tuberculosis in the U.S. through the concerted action of state, local, and territorial programs. NTCA’s objectives are to (1) develop and provide a collective voice for TB Controllers to advance and advocate TB control and elimination activities in the U.S.; (2) counsel agencies, organizations, committees, and task forces on



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issues and actions affecting TB control and elimination at state, local, and territorial levels; (3) work with organizations to advance TB control and elimination in state, local, and territorial levels; (4) support agencies and organizations in efforts beneficial to the advancement of TB control and elimination at state, local, and territorial levels, and (5) advocate for positions, policies, laws, and means to advance TB control and elimination at state, local, and territorial levels.

For additional information, visit www.tbcontrollers.org

ABOUT Stop TB USA

Stop TB USA's mission is to Eliminate TB as a Public Health Threat in the U.S. The goals of Stop TB USA are (1) to serve as a channel of scientific and public health knowledge for the public and U.S. policy makers on the status of tuberculosis elimination globally, nationally and at state and local levels; (2) to educate the public and U.S. policy makers about the need for sustaining community public health activities for the elimination of tuberculosis, including development of new tools; (3) to provide a framework for increasing community participation in the national tuberculosis elimination effort, with emphasis on building awareness in and participation of "at risk" populations; (4) to bring partners together with a clear agreement on the shared objectives for eliminating tuberculosis in the U.S.; and (5) to stand with our colleagues and partners in the effort to eliminate tuberculosis globally.

For additional information, visit www.stoptbusa.org

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