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## **SHORTER COURSE OF TREATMENT RECOMMENDED FOR LATENT TUBERCULOSIS**

BUTTE COUNTY, Calif. — Treating latent tuberculosis normally requires nine months of daily pill-taking, but a recent study showed that a far shorter course of medication, with once-a-week drugs, works just as well. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has now recommended the shorter course of treatment for people with latent TB infection.

“This is the biggest breakthrough in the treatment of latent TB in decades,” said Dr. Mark Lundberg, Health Officer for Butte County Public Health.

Tuberculosis is caused by a slow-growing bacterium that usually infects the lungs. In most cases the body’s immune system controls the organism, so it doesn’t cause disease. Such “latent” cases can turn into organ-destroying disease, however, if a person’s immune defenses are weakened by conditions such as cancer, AIDS, old age, or poor nutrition. To prevent that from happening, doctors advise preventive treatment for people whose test results indicate a recent latent infection. For decades, that has meant taking a daily dose of the drug isoniazid for nine months. A simpler regimen — a higher dose of isoniazid taken once a week, and another drug, rifapentine, also taken weekly, both for three months – has now been shown to be just as effective.

More than 11 million people living in the United States have latent TB infection. About 5 to 10 percent (550,000 to 1.1 million) of those infected with TB in the United States will develop TB disease if not treated. An estimated 300,000 to 400,000 people in the US begin treatment each year for latent TB infection, but many do not complete the lengthy treatment. The 12-dose regimen may ensure better completion rates as it simplifies and shortens treatment from 270 daily doses over nine months, to 12 once-weekly doses over three months by directly observed therapy (a healthcare worker observes the patient take each dose of medication).

“A shorter course of treatment means that more patients will take, and complete, treatment”, stated Lundberg. “That’s a big plus, both for individual patients, and for the public health goal of eliminating tuberculosis.”

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It is estimated that 4.2% of the US population has latent tuberculosis infection. In Butte County that means approximately 9,240 people are infected. Achieving the goal of TB elimination in the United States means not only treating those people who already have TB disease, but also successfully treating those with latent TB infection. According to Lundberg, Public Health's goal is to identify those at highest risk for TB, test them, and treat those who are infected so they do not progress to active disease. Persons should get tested for TB by their doctor or local health department if they:

- Have spent time with a person known or suspected to have active TB disease
- Have HIV infection or another condition that weakens the immune system and puts them at high risk for active TB disease
- Have symptoms of active TB disease
- Are from a country where active TB disease is very common (most countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and Russia)
- Live somewhere in the United States where active TB disease is more common such as a homeless shelter, migrant farm camp, prison or jail, or some nursing homes
- Inject illegal drugs

Persons from these groups should be periodically tested for TB.

For more information on TB visit the Butte County Public Health website at [www.buttecounty.net/publichealth](http://www.buttecounty.net/publichealth) or call Butte County Public Health at 891-2732 or 538-2840.

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### **Butte County Public Health Department**

Our Mission: To protect the public through promoting individual, community and environmental health.