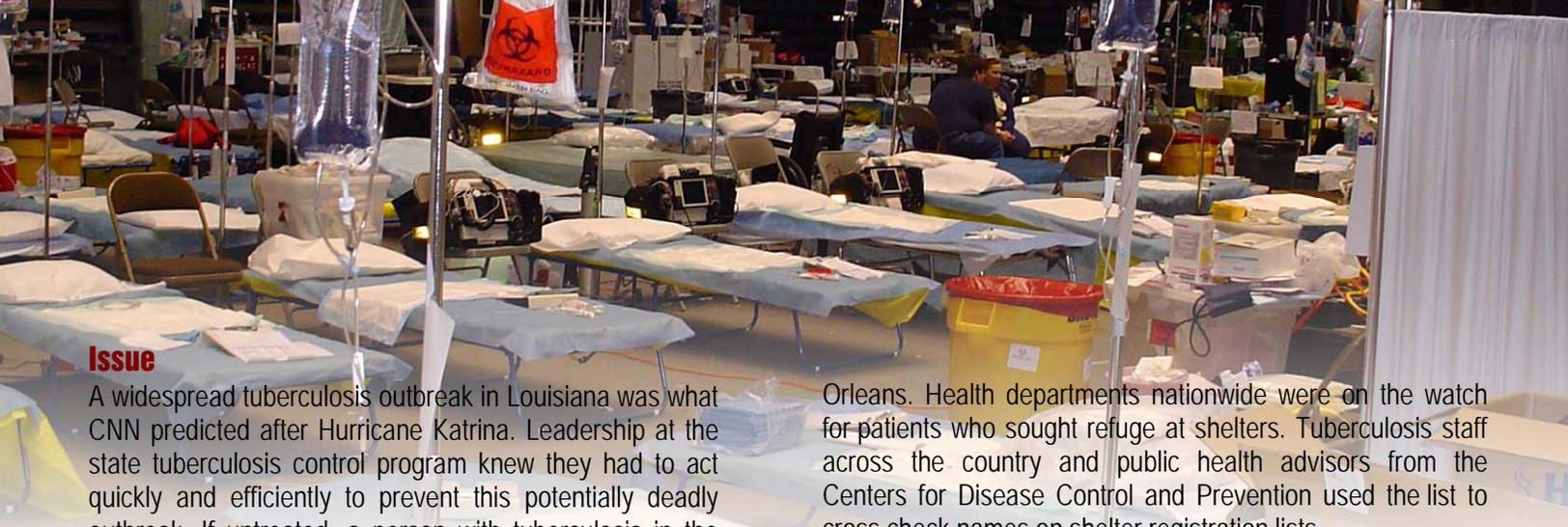


Preventing a Tuberculosis Nightmare in the United States After Hurricane Katrina



Issue

A widespread tuberculosis outbreak in Louisiana was what CNN predicted after Hurricane Katrina. Leadership at the state tuberculosis control program knew they had to act quickly and efficiently to prevent this potentially deadly outbreak. If untreated, a person with tuberculosis in the lungs can spread the contagious disease easily through the air by coughing, sneezing or even just talking. In the nightmarish aftermath of Katrina, 137 clients with infectious tuberculosis had evacuated, and their whereabouts were unknown. Four out of eight tuberculosis staff in Louisiana had also evacuated, and state laboratory and pharmacy offices were destroyed.

- One person with active tuberculosis will infect 10 to 15 people each year if not treated.
- About two million people die from tuberculosis worldwide.
- Louisiana has the 10th highest rate (5.6/100,000) of tuberculosis in the U.S. (4.9/100,000).
- Health care cost for tuberculosis is \$703.1 million/year; total cost is over \$1 billion for the U.S.
- Tuberculosis costs Louisiana \$11,500 per person annually.
- Preventing and curing tuberculosis has been possible thanks to Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant funding over the years.

Intervention

Tuberculosis staff who could remain in the state set up temporary command centers at parish health units in north and south Louisiana. Neighboring states and medical supply firms were contacted by telephone, fax, and email to help Louisiana reestablish its tuberculosis operations. A list of patients with tuberculosis was compiled from the register taken from the state public health office in New

Orleans. Health departments nationwide were on the watch for patients who sought refuge at shelters. Tuberculosis staff across the country and public health advisors from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention used the list to cross check names on shelter registration lists.

- Persons found in shelters were given medical attention and isolated, if needed.
- Texas Department of State Health Services staff performed laboratory analysis on all tuberculosis samples from Louisiana.
- VersaPharm, a pharmaceutical company, donated all needed medications to Louisiana.
- Illinois (Suburban Cook County) donated a mobile unit bus to conduct clinics.
- Alabama State Health department donated a portable x-ray machine.
- Louisiana laboratory staff began to run liver function tests three weeks after the storm.

Impact

The PHHS Block Grant funds have allowed Louisiana to maintain a tuberculosis control program equipped to adequately handle what could have been a widespread outbreak of tuberculosis. This kind of dynamic, locally defined funding proved invaluable in preventing a tuberculosis nightmare in Louisiana.

- 137 clients with tuberculosis were located across the country and no outbreaks occurred.
- Tuberculosis clinics have resumed in some parts of the evacuated areas in Louisiana.
- States have picked up the cost of care for evacuated clients with tuberculosis.

Sources: 1.) American Lung Association, <http://www.lungusa.org>; 2.) World Health Organization, <http://www.who.int>; 3.) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <http://www.cdc.gov>, <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/PDF/wk/mm5310.pdf>; 4.) Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, Office of Public Health, Tuberculosis Control Program <http://www.oph.dhh.state.la.us/tuberculosis/index.html>