

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Monday 21 March 2011

Sydney TB scare shines spotlight on globally neglected and age old disease.

The recent detection of tuberculosis (TB) in a Sydney based health worker, potentially threatening the lives of babies and families has again put a timely spotlight on a disease which has been present since at least the time of the Egyptian mummies.

With World TB Day this week on March 24, why is it that TB, a disease that is preventable, treatable and curable, currently kills 1.7 million people globally (equivalent to the population of Perth) every year?

Whilst TB is a well controlled and managed disease in Australia, with infection rates remaining stable for more than 20 years at just over 5 per 100,000 people, the answer lies in part is because: the most widely used diagnostic tools are antiquated, slow and not always accurate; the 50 year old drug regime is only effective with strict adherence to a minimum six month course of treatment; and the currently used vaccines are only partially effective.

In its pulmonary form TB is easily spread when an infected person simply laughs, coughs, sneezes or even talks. Two billion people globally (one in three people) carry the TB bacilli but only one in ten of these people will develop active TB in their lifetime. However, TB thrives in conditions of poverty, overcrowding and when people's immune systems are poor due to such things as poor nutrition, diabetes and especially HIV.

Many countries on Australia's doorstep have high burdens of tuberculosis. There are more than 400,000 new cases of TB diagnosed in Indonesia annually and in Timor Leste infection rates are 100 times higher than in Australia.

Anti poverty advocacy group [RESULTS](#) is calling for a significant increase in Federal aid support to the [Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria](#) which currently provides two thirds of the global funding for programs to combat TB. RESULTS is also urging the government to assist Indonesia to rollout a breakthrough diagnostic tool for TB called *Xpert MTB/RIF*.

RESULTS National manager, Maree Nutt says "Xpert reduces diagnostic time from weeks to minutes and with greater accuracy. In the fight to combat TB its the best news in 50 years."

Kerrie Shaw, Executive Officer of the [Australian Respiratory Council](#) agrees that TB is a very common disease globally. "TB remains a significant problem, especially in poorly resourced countries. We can assist in the control of TB in Australia and in our region by supporting international efforts to develop new drugs, vaccines and tests, better resource health services and address poverty" says Ms Shaw.

ENDS

MEDIA CONTACT:

Maree Nutt
National Manager, RESULTS International (Australia)
0404 808 849

Kerrie Shaw
Executive Officer, Australian Respiratory Council
0400 936 393

RESULTS International (Australia) www.results.org.au engages in grassroots advocacy on poverty issues through its members around the country. It is also one of nine partner organizations in ACTION (**Advocacy to Control TB Internationally**) www.action.org