Rise in new tuberculosis cases in Singapore last year

SINGAPORE: Tuberculosis (TB) remains endemic in Singapore, with the number of new cases of active TB among Singapore residents rising in 2016.

In a press statement released on World TB day on Friday (Mar 24), the Ministry of Health (MOH) said that there were 1,617 new cases of active TB in 2016 - slightly higher than the 1,498 new cases recorded in 2015, with older age groups and males continuing to make up a significant proportion of these new active TB cases.

MOH added that there were 41.1 new TB cases per 100,000 population in 2016, compared to 38.4 cases per 100,000 in 2015.

Latent TB infection is "not uncommon" in Singapore's population MOH said, with rates of up to 30 per cent in older age groups, as TB had been prevalent in Singapore until the 1970s.
Most of the new TB cases (81.3 per cent) among Singapore residents were from those born in Singapore. Of the 1,617 new cases in 2016, 68.8 per cent were 50 years old and above, and 65.9 per cent were male.

There were also 142 relapsed cases of TB among Singapore residents in 2016.

In addition, MOH said that the emergence of multi-drug-resistant TB (MDR-TB) - which is more difficult to treat and has lower cure rates - remains a serious public health challenge. In 2016, Singapore had three new cases of MDR-TB who were Singapore-born residents. The death rate for MDR-TB is as high as 30 to 40 per cent.

**NO NEED FOR PLACES WITH RECENT TB CASE TO CLOSE**

MOH stressed that the spread of TB is preventable and that the disease is curable.

"There is no need for work places or other places where a recently diagnosed active TB case has visited to be closed," MOH added. "Persons diagnosed with active TB are placed on treatment, and appropriate medical leave, and rapidly become non-infectious once treatment starts."

"Hence, there is no further risk of exposure in the workplace. Workplace or close contacts found to have latent TB infection are not infectious and can continue their activities as usual," MOH said.

- CNA/nc