



**\* FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE \***

**CONTACT: Jennifer Thomas Barrows**

860/675-6869

jthomas@apic.org

## **APIC CONTINUES TO PUSH FOR DELAY OF OSHA FIT-TESTING MANDATE**

WASHINGTON, D.C., July 1, 2004— Infection Control Professionals nationwide are urging the Bush Administration to delay enforcement of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) General Industry Respiratory Protection Standard (GIRPS) for potential exposure to tuberculosis (TB) in healthcare facilities.

The Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology (APIC) and other healthcare associations believe that this mandate, which went into effect July 1, 2004, is scientifically unjustified, and that workers are already adequately protected by guidelines issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

“We were extremely disappointed that OSHA chose to move forward with this mandate as scheduled, despite input from many science-based health organizations. I want to assure the public that healthcare workers would absolutely *not* be at increased risk as a result of a delay. CDC guidelines have been implemented in healthcare facilities across the country, and they are working,” explained APIC President Jeanne Pfeiffer, RN, CIC. “TB risk for healthcare workers in the United States is at the lowest level in recorded history, thanks to the combined efforts of the CDC and the medical and public health communities. CDC guidelines, based on community and facility risk, are currently undergoing revision to address the changing epidemiology of TB and new technologic advancements--a static regulatory standard is not flexible, adaptable or applicable to all settings.”

The OSHA regulation mandates annual fit-testing of respirators for employees. The scientific or epidemiologic rationale for this new mandate has not been met. In addition to the fact that TB transmission in healthcare facilities has been controlled without annual fit-testing, the National Institute of Safety and Health (NIOSH) has published numerous studies demonstrating the lack of consistency and reliability of fit-testing methods for currently used respirators. This extremely burdensome task will take nurses and other staff away from their patient care duties to undergo a series of needless exercises.

The CDC is currently planning a meeting with key agencies, associations and the scientific community to develop evidence-based respiratory protection guidelines for healthcare settings. The delay would allow CDC, OSHA, and other stakeholders to

comprehensively review the latest scientific information, and develop sound, consistent guidance for the healthcare community. Meanwhile, the healthcare community will continue to effectively protect healthcare workers from TB and other infectious diseases through the hierarchy of control measures that are currently in place.

This delay is supported by numerous health associations, as well as the CDC's Advisory Council for the Elimination of Tuberculosis – a committee that makes recommendations to CDC Director Julie Gerberding and Secretary of Health and Human Services, Tommy Thompson.

APIC represents more than 10,000 infection control professionals, approximately 9,000 of whom are nurses. APIC's membership is also comprised of microbiologists, medical technologists and physicians. APIC members' primary job responsibility is controlling and preventing infections – in both patients and healthcare workers – across the continuum of healthcare.

**Contact**

Contact Jennifer Thomas Barrows at 860/675/6869 or [jthomas@apic.org](mailto:jthomas@apic.org).

###