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Riverside County health officials investigating two unrelated tuberculosis cases

Health officials are working to notify people who may have been infected with tuberculosis after two unrelated cases were reported in different locations in Riverside County.

In one instance, a student at Desert Mirage High School in Thermal is suspected of having tuberculosis, and health officials believe the circumstances warrant notification of those who may have been exposed. The student, who is not being identified, was hospitalized and is receiving treatment.

In the other instance, an employee who works for the Riverside County Department of Public Social Services in Lake Elsinore has been diagnosed with active tuberculosis, but county health officials believe the individual had minimal contact with the public while the person was infectious.

The individual, who is not being identified, was hospitalized and is now receiving treatment at home. Public health officials are working to identify who and how many people might have been exposed to the illness. The two cases are not related.

“TB is a treatable illness once it is diagnosed. The risk of transmission is low in both instances, but we are working to ensure that anyone who may have been exposed will be tested as a precaution,” said Dr. Cameron Kaiser, Riverside County public health officer.

If the initial TB test is positive, individuals will then be referred for a chest x-ray.

Those who might have been exposed to TB will be notified by letter – or their parents/guardians for students – and will be tested. The letters were mailed out this week. Those who do not receive a letter from the Health Department are not considered at risk for infection.

Coachella Valley Unified Superintendent Dr. Darryl Adams urged people who receive the letters to get tested, and he said the district has been working closely with county health officials.

“The District’s No. 1 priority is the safety and health of all of our students and entire staff,” he said. “The student identified is not currently in school. While the case is not confirmed, the district office and high school administration are fully cooperating with the health department to follow proper county protocol in identifying and notifying anyone who may have been exposed to the illness as a precaution. Working together we can make sure to keep our school community healthy.”

Tuberculosis is a disease spread through the air during prolonged, repeated and close contact with an individual who is infected with active tuberculosis. When left untreated, TB can result in complications that can be serious. TB is not spread by shaking hands, sharing food or drink, or via bed linens or toilet seats.

Symptoms include a productive cough, unexplained weight loss, fever and feeling tired. Not everyone infected with TB bacteria becomes sick. A person with inactive (latent) TB cannot spread it to others.

Anyone concerned about TB can contact your health care provider or the Public Health Department Disease Control at 951-358-5107. For additional information about tuberculosis, visit www.rivco-diseasecontrol.org

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