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Three Eisenhower Medical Center patients test positive for tuberculosis

About 500 patients and employees of Eisenhower Medical Center are being urged to be tested for tuberculosis after three patients were diagnosed with an active form of the respiratory illness.

The three patients are being treated and are expected to recover. They are not being identified because of confidentiality rules. There is no indication that the cases at Eisenhower are related, and Riverside County health officials have not determined how the illness was contracted.

Riverside University Health System-Public Health and the Rancho Mirage-based hospital are notifying the approximately 500 staff members and patients who may have been exposed to the disease and urging them to be tested for TB. Those who test positive will be referred for an X-ray and evaluation for appropriate treatment.

Barbara Cole, director of disease control for Public Health, said it may be uncommon to have three cases diagnosed at the same time from the same hospital, but emphasized there is no cause for alarm.

“There are no indications the illness has spread beyond the initial patients, but the testing will provide peace of mind for those who receive the notifications and get tested,” said Cole. “We are working closely with the hospital to keep the community safe.”

County health officials said the risk of transmission is low, but reminded the community that tuberculosis should not be taken lightly.

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 fatigue. 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 their health care provider or the Public Health Department Disease Control at 951-358-5107. For additional information about tuberculosis, visit www.rivco-diseasecontrol.org