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TUBERCULOSIS INVESTIGATION CONTINUES

PALM BEACH COUNTY, FL—The Palm Beach County Health Department is continuing its investigation into possible exposures to tuberculosis from a student diagnosed with the disease earlier this month at Seminole Ridge High School.

Letters were sent to students, teachers and other staff members identified as close contacts recommending they receive a tuberculosis skin test through their private doctor or from the Health Department on June 7 or 8 at the High School. The skin test is a small injection under the skin that leaves a small bump. Two to three days later a medical professional reviews the bump's size to see if further testing might be needed.

“When we investigate a TB case we first get a confirmatory diagnosis from a skin test, chest X-ray and possibly a sputum test. We also determine what antibiotics are effective in the treatment to assure it is not resistant to one or many antibiotics. We then interview and test the immediate family and closest contacts. If evidence warrants, we extend our search into the community,” said Health Department Director, Dr. Alina Alonso. Alonso added that her TB staff follows the patient for the entire period needed to confirm a cure. Staff also conducts Direct Drug Observation Therapy (DOT) to make sure patients complete their drug regimen. Failure to complete treatment can result in involuntary hospitalization. If treatment is not completed the patient is also at risk of developing a drug resistant strain of TB called Multidrug-Resistant or MDR TB.

Although cases of Latent TB Infection (LTBI), TB Disease and MDR TB are declining in the county cases are still present and must be investigated.

LTBI is found in persons who were exposed to the disease at some point in their life and their body has contained the mycobacterium tuberculosis. These individuals are at risk of TB disease at any time. The disease is, in most cases, characterized by respiratory problems that result in constant coughing for more than three weeks, fever, night sweats, weight loss and coughing up blood. A person with TB disease can pass it on through airborne particles as a result of coughing. For both conditions (LTBI and TB Disease) treatment is available.

CDC guidelines no longer recommend testing for all persons entering school, day care and most work locations. Some groups however, it is recommended, should be tested:

- Persons who have been recently infected
- Persons who have been in contact with a person with TB,
- Recent Immigrants from TB-endemic regions of the world
- Residents and employees of high-risk congregate settings (jails, homeless shelters, health care facilities.)
- Persons with clinical conditions that increase their risk of progressing from LTBI to TB disease. (HIV infected, immune compromised, drug users, etc)

More information on Tuberculosis can be obtained by calling the Health Department, 888-411-4358, www.pbchd.com,

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