



Tuberculosis Exposure and Steps to Take

2/15/2018

What is happening?

Someone who has spent time at Reynolds Learning Academy was recently found to have tuberculosis (TB) of the lung. This means some staff and students may have been exposed to TB. This person is not at the school right now.

Multnomah County Health Department is working closely with school district leadership to notify those students and staff who need to be tested for TB.

What is TB? What are the risks and concerns with TB?

TB is caused by a bacteria. It is spread through the air from one person to another when someone who is sick with TB coughs, speaks or sings. People who breathe the germs into their lungs can become infected. Most people who have been exposed to TB will not become infected. A safe and simple skin or blood test can tell whether a person has been infected. TB disease can be treated and prevented with antibiotics.

How contagious is TB?

TB is rarely spread in schools. People usually get infected as a result of close face-to-face contact for several hours with someone who has the disease – typically daily contact for weeks or months. You are not likely to get TB from someone walking in the hallway or from a brief conversation. Tuberculosis is not spread by sharing clothing, dishes, or drinking glasses.

How do I know if I was exposed?

The Multnomah County Health Department has carefully looked at the situation and will send a letter to certain people who need TB testing. The letter will explain where and how to get tested.

What happens if I was exposed?

Multnomah County Health Department will offer free, private TB testing on Friday, February 23, 2018 between 8:30am-10:30am in the Reynolds Learning Academy nurse's office. A safe and simple skin or blood test can tell whether a person has been infected. You can also see your own health care provider for a test or for any other health concerns.

What if I'm not able to be tested on Friday, February 23, 2018?

You can see your own health care provider or call the Multnomah County Health Department at 503-988-3406 to schedule a TB evaluation at our clinic in downtown Portland.

Do I need to cancel travel or stay away from family?

No. TB is a slow-moving disease. It takes months to years to become ill with TB and be potentially infectious to others. Exposed students and staff are very unlikely to pose a risk to their families, friends, or coworkers.

What does a TB test involve?

TB can be diagnosed with a skin test or a blood test. Health Department staff will recommend one or the other based on an individual's particular situation.

The skin test involves injecting a small amount of testing fluid into the skin in the lower arm. This tests your immune response to proteins that look like the TB bacteria. The result is "read" by Health Department staff within 2-3 days.

The blood test is done like any other routine blood test and also looks for the body's immune response to proteins that look like the TB bacteria. The results are available a few days after the blood sample is taken.

Why is the Health Department recommending a second TB test later?

It can take up to eight weeks for the body's immune system to respond to the TB infection and show up as a positive skin or blood test. If the first test is negative, a second TB test is done eight weeks after the sick person was last at the school to make sure the results of people exposed are truly negative for TB infection.

What if I was infected?

If you have a positive blood or skin test, you will be sent for a routine chest x-ray and asked about TB symptoms to look for early TB disease. If you are feeling well and your chest x-ray is normal, you will be offered preventive antibiotics for latent TB infection to lower your chances of ever becoming sick with active TB. You can take treatment for the non-active or "latent" TB infection. That is your choice. The treatment lasts anywhere from three months to one year depending on a person's medical history and other factors.

I have tested positive and/or been treated for TB before and was told I was exposed. What do I do?

Come to the TB screening Friday, February 23, 2018 between 8:30am-10:30am at Reynolds Learning Academy nurse's office. Health Department staff will review your TB testing history in detail, make sure you do not have any symptoms of active TB disease, and make other recommendations based on your individual circumstances.

What is the difference between latent and active TB?

TB infection is diagnosed by a simple blood test or skin test. If the test is positive the next step is a chest x-ray to make sure there are no early signs of TB disease. Anyone with a positive TB test and a normal chest x-ray has latent (non-active) TB. They are not sick and cannot spread the disease to others. Most people with the latent form of TB will never become sick. For the few that do, it usually takes months or years to become ill and potentially spread TB to others. Taking preventive antibiotics can lower the chances that someone with latent TB will ever become sick with TB.

Active TB develops in about 10 percent of people with latent TB. When someone has active TB, they feel sick and have symptoms. TB can affect any organ in the body, but it most often affects the lungs (pulmonary TB). The symptoms of active pulmonary TB are typically fever, cough, night sweats and weight loss. People with active pulmonary TB can spread the infection to others, usually the people they spend the most time with. People with active TB in other parts of their body outside the lungs cannot spread the disease to others.

People with latent TB are more likely to develop active TB if they have a weakened immune system or other medical conditions like diabetes or kidney disease.

I'm expecting a child. How will this affect me?

TB testing is safe during pregnancy. Antibiotics to treat TB are also considered safe during pregnancy. But sometimes pregnant women choose to wait until after delivery to be treated. Transmission of TB from mother to child during pregnancy is extremely rare. Talk to your health care provider and let them know they can call the Health Department at 503-988-3406 for advice.

Who is the source of the TB exposure?

Information about the sick person is protected by medical privacy laws.

What is being done to make sure this doesn't happen again?

Whenever groups of people spend time together there is a risk of disease transmission. Health Department staff carefully look at each situation to see if anything can be done differently in the future to prevent the spread of a disease.

Who is in charge?

The overall public health investigation is being led by Dr. Jennifer Vines, Multnomah County Health Department TB Clinic Medical Director. She is working closely with school district leadership.

What is the Multnomah County Health Department Communicable Disease Services Program, and what does it do?

Communicable Disease Services works to stop the spread of contagious diseases like TB. This is part of their core public health work, and it is something they do every day. The program includes the Communicable Disease Services Clinic, which works on TB disease investigations, provides case management and treatment of people with active TB, and contacts people who have been exposed to TB.

For more information, please contact the Multnomah County Health Department Tuberculosis Clinic at (503) 988-3406.