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TB test clinic planned Friday at Indio High School

As Riverside County health officials prepare to test about 1,800 students and faculty at Indio High School for tuberculosis, they continued Thursday to emphasize that the likelihood the illness will spread remains low.

On Monday, 131 students were tested for the illness after a student was diagnosed with active tuberculosis recently. The tests were reviewed and 45 students tested positive for possible exposure to the illness, which does not mean they have active tuberculosis but requires that they receive further testing.

On Thursday, follow up X-rays identified five students who require further examination. Riverside County Public Health Officer Dr. Cameron Kaiser ordered the testing expanded to the entire student body and staff. Kaiser emphasized that the risk of infection remains low, but that the action is being taken strictly as a precaution.

"While the number of those who tested positive is higher than we would expect, that does not mean the illness has spread or will spread," Kaiser said. "The likelihood of the illness being passed from one person to the next is remote."

Health and school officials have scheduled the testing clinic tomorrow at Indio High School starting at 8 a.m. The clinic is for students and faculty from Indio High, and Kaiser said there is no indication at this point that testing is necessary at any other school or in other parts of the community.

"Riverside County is taking appropriate actions to reduce the public's exposure to tuberculosis," said Supervisor John J. Benoit. "This is a serious situation that calls for medically necessary precautions to protect the health of our community."

The news conference was called by Supervisor Benoit as a way to have Dr. Kaiser explain for the media and the public about the extensive medical precautions being taken by Riverside County health officials.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, tuberculosis is caused by bacteria that usually attack the lungs, but it can attack any part of the body such as the kidney, spine, and brain. If not treated properly, TB disease can be fatal. It is spread through the air from one person to another. The TB bacteria are put into the air when a person with TB disease of the lungs or throat coughs, sneezes, speaks, or sings. People nearby may breathe in these bacteria and become infected.

It is not spread by shaking someone's hand, sharing food or drink, touching bed linens or toilet seats, sharing toothbrushes or kissing. Some of the symptoms include: Coughing with sputum for more than 3-4 weeks, coughing up blood, pain in the chest when breathing, unexplained loss of appetite or weight loss and fever with night sweats for more than three