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Department of Health Investigates TB Case in New Mexico Health-care Worker

(Santa Fe) – The New Mexico Department of Health is screening approximately 250 individuals in Albuquerque and Clovis to rule out the spread of tuberculosis (TB) from a health-care worker who was recently diagnosed with the disease. The Department of Health and other agencies have already tested 73 individuals who have been in close contact with the worker. There is no evidence of disease transmission to date.

As the investigation progresses, the Department may identify additional people who should be screened. The Department is providing treatment for the health-care worker. Federal and state patient privacy laws prohibit the Department from releasing the patient's name or identifying information.

“We know who was potentially exposed to TB in this case, and we will be in touch with you if we think you need to be tested,” said Dr. Marcos Burgos, the department's medical director of the tuberculosis program. “We are contacting individuals who may have been exposed so we can treat them if they are infected.”

Tuberculosis is a disease caused by germs that can be spread from one person to another through the air when a person with TB coughs, sneezes, speaks or sings. TB disease is most likely to be spread from a diseased person to others when they spend frequent time together, such as family members, friends and co-workers. Transmission of TB disease to another person depends on three factors: close contact in confined spaces, duration of contact and frequency of contact.

TB germs can live in the body without making someone sick. This is called latent TB infection. People with latent TB infection cannot spread TB to others and can be treated to prevent development of TB disease. If someone has TB disease, germs are actively growing and can make people sick.

Symptoms of TB include a strong cough that lasts several weeks, coughing up bloody sputum, chest pain, weakness or fatigue, weight loss, appetite loss, chills, fever and night sweats.

The Department will use skin and blood tests to screen for TB infection and disease. In some cases, the Department will use chest x-rays to further evaluate individuals exposed. Tuberculosis is preventable and curable. TB disease can be treated by taking medication for six to 12 months.

There were 51 cases of tuberculosis in New Mexico in 2007 and 48 in 2006. There have been 15 cases diagnosed so far this year.

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