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A Middle school student tests positive for active TB; screening clinic planned next week in Palm Springs

A student at Raymond Cree Middle School in Palm Springs has tested positive for active tuberculosis, and Riverside County health officials have planned a TB testing clinic next week for students who may have been exposed.

The student, who was briefly hospitalized, is receiving treatment at home and is expected to recover. Riverside University Health System-Public Health is working with Palm Springs Unified School District officials to identify anyone else who may have been exposed to the illness.

The parents of about 50 students today received an electronic letter from Public Health and the school district informing them that their child may have been exposed. They were encouraged to have their child screened at a local clinic planned for April 18. A letter is also being sent by Public Health by mail to those parents. About 20 staff members who were possibly exposed will also be notified.

Another letter informing parents about the TB case is being sent out, but that correspondence is only informational. The children of parents who receive the informational letter are not considered at risk for exposure.

“We are working in collaboration with RUHS-Public Health on notification and screening logistics to ensure that students and staff who may have been exposed receive the information and follow up guidance in a timely manner,” said PSUSD Director of Health Services Laura Dyson. “We are grateful to have the resources of our county public

health department and the officials there who remain the experts in infectious disease information and management.”

The disease spreads through the air during prolonged, repeated, and close contact with an individual who is infected with active tuberculosis. Symptoms can include a persistent cough, fever, night sweats and unexplainable weight loss.

In most cases, people infected with the illness won't see it develop into active tuberculosis, but will simply remain infected with the bacteria with no symptoms, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It will still, however, show up on a skin test.

Dr. Geoffrey Leung, public health officer for Riverside County, said while the risk of infection is low, it's important for parents who receive the notification letter to get their children tested.

"The testing is quick and can provide peace of mind for both parents and children," Leung said. "Once the test is administered, the child will need to come back in two days to have it read by a health care worker."

If the skin test reads positive, the student will need to get a chest X-ray and follow up with Public Health to determine if active tuberculosis is present or if the patient was only exposed to it, health officials said.