Tuberculosis Outbreak at High School in Kansas

Tyler Jones  March 19, 2015

Health officials said a total of 27 students may have been infected with tuberculosis in Kansas City area high school.

(Newswire.net -- March 19, 2015) -- Kansas City, MO – The Missouri state Department of Health and Environment tested more than 300 students at Olathe Northwest High School last week after tuberculosis-infected students were discovered on Monday.

“The number of individuals with TB infection does not exceed what we would anticipate in this setting,” Lougene Marsh, director of the Johnson County Department of Health and Environment, said in a press release.

“Of course, we had hoped we wouldn’t find any additional TB cases, but we knew this was a possibility. That’s why we took such thorough steps to test everyone who might have been in close contact with the first confirmed case of TB disease,” Marsh said. He added that authorities isolated total of 27 students that have been exposed to tuberculosis.

Health officials, however, stated that the presence of the tuberculosis bacteria in an individual does not mean that person would develop tuberculosis disease. So far, none of the students tested have shown symptoms or signs of the disease, officials said.

According to Wikipedia, the classic symptoms of active TB infection are a chronic cough with blood-tinged sputum, fever, night sweats, and weight loss.

“To have TB infection, is not something you can transmit,” said Phil Griffin, a representative from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, to local channel WDAF.

People with tuberculosis disease, however, are contagious and can pass the bacteria onto others through the air, via their breath or cough, but that may require hours of exposure. Giving that incubation of the disease could take up to eight weeks, the Health Department has scheduled another round of blood tests for affected students on May 5, media reported.

According to the World Health Organization, tuberculosis is the second most deadly infectious disease in the world, behind HIV. About 1.5 million people died from the disease in 2013, and 9 million were infected, WHO reported. In the US alone, 9,582 cases were documented in 2013, and last year, there were 40 cases of tuberculosis in Kansas.