



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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DOH CONDUCTS TB TESTING AT WAIANAE HIGH SCHOOL

HONOLULU -- The Hawaii State Department of Health (DOH) conducted tuberculosis (TB) skin testing for 36 students and staff members at Waianae High School last week due to possible exposure from a student who has TB disease. The student is currently receiving treatment and is no longer attending school. None of the students or teachers that were tested appeared to have a new TB infection, and no new cases of TB were found at the school.

DOH was notified of the TB case on Feb. 6 and after assessment of the student, review of attendance records and an onsite inspection of the school environment, TB control staff conducted a contact tracing investigation to identify any individuals that may have been exposed to the disease.

“Tuberculosis usually requires many hours of close indoor contact to spread to others, so only those students with extended exposure in enclosed settings need to be tested,” said Dr. Richard Brostrom, chief of the Tuberculosis Control Branch. “The school screening is an extra measure of safety, and everyone who may have been exposed has been tested.”

“Waianae High School appreciates the quick and thorough support that our students, families and staff have received from the Department of Health,” said Principal Disa Hauge. “We are confident that this serious matter has been addressed and that the health and safety of our students is protected.”

The Waianae High School Administration mailed a letter explaining the situation to the parents and guardians of all students on Feb. 18. A meeting was held with parents and staff members to answer questions, and TB testing was provided for all students and staff who shared the same classroom with the ill student.

Dr. Brostrom added, "The student with tuberculosis is undergoing treatment at our clinic and is doing well. Usually, TB will not cause a problem for many years after the exposure. Screening students gives us an opportunity to prevent TB for those who might have been exposed."

Dr. Glenn Wasserman, division chief of Communicable Disease & Public Health Nursing also commented, "These incidents occur periodically in our state, and we are fortunate to have highly experienced and qualified staff in our TB Control Program. They manage patients with tuberculosis and issues related to tuberculosis every day."

TB is a disease that is commonly seen in the lungs and is spread from person to person through the air. When a person with active TB disease in the lung or throat coughs, sneezes, speaks, or sings, tiny drops containing *M. tuberculosis* may be spread into the air. If another person breathes in these drops there is a chance that they will become infected with TB. Two forms of TB exist, both of which are treatable and curable:

1. Inactive TB infection (sometimes called "latent" TB) – when a person has TB bacteria in their body but the body's immune system is protecting them and they are not sick. Someone with latent TB infection cannot spread the infection to other people.
2. Active TB disease – when a person becomes sick with TB because their immune system can no longer protect them from active TB infection. Someone with active TB disease may be able to spread the infection to other people.

For more information on tuberculosis or TB testing, the public may call the DOH Hawaii Tuberculosis Control Program at 832-5731 or visit the following websites:

- Hawaii State Department of Health at <https://tb.ehawaii.gov/welcome.html>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov/tb

The Tuberculosis Control Program works to reduce the incidence of TB in the state by providing effective prevention, detection, treatment, and educational services. The program offers diagnosis and treatment of TB; ensures that all cases and suspected cases of TB in Hawaii are identified and appropriately treated; and provides preventive therapy for people at high risk of developing TB disease. People who are at high-risk include contacts of active cases, persons who are HIV positive, and those with evidence of untreated TB. Through its clinics located in four counties, the program conducts direct TB services including chest X-ray, sputum smear and culture for mycobacteria, tuberculin skin testing, and treatment with effective tuberculosis medications using directly observed therapy.

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