

Press release



April 2011

Confirmed case of Tuberculosis (TB) Year 11 students at Fairfield High School, Bristol offered TB tests

The Health Protection Agency (HPA) is working closely with NHS Bristol and Fairfield High School, Bristol following confirmation that a student at the school has been diagnosed with tuberculosis (TB).

The student who had the infection has made a full recovery.

TB is a bacterial infection, which is treated with antibiotics. Fortunately, it is not easily passed from person to person and generally the risk to others is low.

As a precautionary measure, the HPA and NHS Bristol are offering TB tests to all students and staff in the same year group as the student.

HPA and NHS colleagues will run screening sessions at the school over a three day period in April. Each person will answer a set of simple health questions and be offered a blood test for TB. The rest of the school who have had significantly less contact will be given advice about the signs and symptoms of TB.

Dr Bharat Pankhania, South West (North) Health Protection Unit:

“First and foremost, it is important to stress that TB is difficult to catch. The people who are most at risk are those living in the same household.

“Even though the risk is low, we want to ensure that children and staff in the same year at the school do not have the infection, which is why we are offering tests to this large group. If anyone is found to have TB, they can be given appropriate treatment.

“Many of the students will be leaving school this year so it’s a good time to screen them for the infection. The new TB blood tests available can detect if someone is carrying the infection without symptoms and therefore could go onto develop the disease in the future. This means we have the opportunity to stop staff or students from developing the disease later on in life, as well as identifying any cases of active TB.

“It is important to remember that TB is a curable infection which can be treated effectively with antibiotics, particularly if found early.

“We are working closely with the school to provide as much information as possible to parents and staff. A letter from the school containing advice from the HPA has been sent to all parents, either offering their child a TB test if they are in the same year group, or giving them general advice about TB.

“If we find any cases, they will be referred to a chest physician for further investigation and treatment.”

Hugh Annett, director of public health in Bristol welcomed the proposed TB screening programme: “This is a good example of a public health initiative that will give us the chance to screen pupils to pick up cases before symptoms have developed and the person has become infectious to others (latent tuberculosis).

“Early diagnosis is important, particularly at a time when some of the pupils are preparing to leave the school.”

Catriona Mangham, Headteacher of Fairfield High School said:

“We are working closely with the Health Protection Agency, our families and staff to limit their risk from developing tuberculosis. The best way of doing this is through screening as one student has been confirmed with the infection and we want to make sure that there are no other cases present in the school community. This student has now made a full recovery.

“I would like to reassure parents and staff that the risk is low but we need to take pre-emptive action to ensure their wellbeing.”

Notes for Editors:

What is TB?

Tuberculosis is a disease caused by a bacterium (a germ) which usually affects the lungs. Sometimes TB can affect other parts of the body, for example it can appear as a lump in the neck. Although TB is not a common illness in the UK, it can affect people of all ages and nationalities. We now have safe and effective treatments that can cure TB.

How is it spread?

If TB is in the lungs the TB germs can be coughed into the air by people who are ill with the disease (known as sputum positive, infectious or “open” TB). These germs can then be breathed in by others. However, most people with the disease have a cough that does not contain the germs (known as sputum negative TB).

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms include fatigue, weight loss, weakness, fever, sweating and loss of appetite, but these may also occur in other illnesses. When the lungs are affected, the patient may have a chronic cough (lasting three weeks or more); this may be dry or there may be sputum and sometimes blood is coughed up.

Is it infectious?

Some types of TB are infectious and can be passed on to others. Close family members and, occasionally, close friends, workmates and school friends will be asked to visit the Chest Clinic to check that others have not caught it.

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How many children and staff are being offered tests?

190- 200 children and another 10-20 staff are being offered the test.

Why screen people who have been in contact with TB?

There are two reasons why we screen people who have been in contact with TB:

- Some of the contacts may have already caught TB but may not be aware of it. Treating these people can prevent them from becoming ill with TB or from passing the bacteria onto others.
- People who have been in contact with TB can provide useful information about others who may also have been contacts and therefore at risk of infection.

Will testing be offered to any other schools?

- The Secondary department of Elmfield School for the Deaf is co-located on the Fairfield site, Y11 students and staff from Elmfield who may have mixed with the case have also be offered the test and parents and GPs informed in line with Fairfield students. No other school is being offered testing.

When will the results be ready?

- Results available after a week or so. We will write directly to parents to give results and provide advice.

What is BCG policy now?

- The BCG immunisation increases a person's immunity to TB and protects against the most severe forms of disease such as TB meningitis.
- The schools' programme nationally has been replaced by targeted immunisation of children at increased risk of TB.
- The main recommendations for routine BCG vaccination of children are now: infants (aged 0 to 12 months) living in areas with a high incidence of TB (40/100,000 or greater), and any children with a parent or grandparent born in a high incidence country.
- As Bristol is a low incidence area (i.e. less than 40 cases per 100,000 population), local arrangements exist to opportunistically identify, test and immunise those children at increased risk of TB who will no longer be offered BCG immunisation through the schools' program.

Can children continue to attend school?

- **YES** - People who have been in contact with TB do not need to stay off school/work or avoid going on holiday. They should attend as normal before and after being screened.

Media enquiries - please contact Casey Palmer, HPA South West Communications (01452 378907).

For School media enquiries, please contact Julia Walton, Children and Young People Bristol City Council on: 0117 9222732

Further information about tuberculosis is available from TB Alert at: www.tbalert.org, and from the HPA's website www.hpa.org.uk