



Monday , June 11, 2007

Colorado College Student Dies of Tuberculosis

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. —

A college student who died of tuberculosis last week probably did not have a drug-resistant strain of the disease, health officials said Monday.

The woman, whose name was not released, died Friday after arriving at the Memorial Hospital emergency room, but officials did not determine that TB was the cause of death until Monday.

An investigation was under way to identify and contact anyone who might be at risk of contracting TB from exposure to the woman, officials said. FOX News reports that the concern is whether anyone was close enough to the patient when she was coughing to breathe it in, a process known as tracking the "circles of risk"

They said if she had been contagious, any risk of exposure probably occurred in February or later.

Health officials described the victim as an international student who lived in Colorado Springs and attended Colorado State University-Pueblo, about 40 miles south.

University president Joseph Garcia said the woman never lived in a residence hall. He said the school would provide health officials with her class schedule and the names of anyone she had contact with.

Dr. Ned Colange, chief medical officer for the state Department of Public Health and Environment, refused to release her name, age or home country, citing privacy laws.

But he said she was from "a country where tuberculosis was endemic" and probably contracted it there before coming to the U.S. He said she had not traveled out of the country since February.

Colange said the only way health officials will know if she had drug-resistant TB is if someone she was in contact with comes down with that strain. He said doctors cannot test for that strain once a patient has died.

"Since most tuberculosis is not drug-resistant, it makes it less likely this one is drug-resistant," he said.

Colange said this case was unrelated to that of Andrew Speaker, an Atlanta lawyer being treated for extensive drug-resistant tuberculosis at National Jewish Medical and Research Center in Denver. Speaker drew national attention because of his travel overseas and his ability to get back into the country despite federal orders that he be stopped at the border.

Colange said Colorado has about 120 cases of TB annually, and about five to 10 die per year, usually from a depressed immune system and not from TB alone.

Tuberculosis kills 1.6 million people around the world every year; in 2004, it killed 662 people in the U.S.

In 2006, there were 13,767 cases of TB reported in the U.S., the lowest ever, according to the National Tuberculosis Controllers Association. But 20 states reported an increase in cases over 2005, and the District of Columbia had the highest rate — 12.6 cases per 100,000 people.

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