

# Scabies outbreak reported at senior center

By KATE BAXTER, STAFF WRITER

PORT CHARLOTTE — Health officials are monitoring a possible scabies outbreak at a local residential facility for seniors.

As many as 50 residents at Royal Palm Retirement Centre, a 182-room independent- and assisted-living community on Aaron Street, have shown symptoms of the contagious skin infection, said Lincoln Lloyd, an environmental specialist with the Charlotte County Health Department.

Residents first reported signs from the apparent scabies infestation in June, Lloyd said Friday.

The origin of the outbreak is not known, but it likely started from an isolated source, such as a resident or a guest, he said.

Scabies is very contagious and spreads quickly through close contact, Lloyd said.

Royal Palm staff already had implemented a number of changes, likely short-term, following the first sign of infestation, Lloyd said.

“The center itself imposed restrictions (right away),” Lloyd said.

They include canceling social activities and group functions, encouraging residents to stay in their rooms when possible, increasing laundry services, and closely monitoring outside guests and visitors, according to Mark Ackerman, executive director.

Ackerman said those efforts by his staff are “above and beyond” the recommendations by the health department.

“We will continue to make every effort to contain and minimize any chance of exposure among our residents,” Ackerman said in a prepared statement.

Scabies is skin infection caused by female mites burrowing into the upper layers of the epidermis, officials said.

Chances for scabies exposure increase in shared living quarters like nursing homes or dorms, Lloyd said.

A person affected by scabies will experience itching, often intense, as the mites lay eggs under the skin.

Because the Aaron Street facility houses older people with weaker immune systems and who are susceptible to illness, officials are characterizing the outbreak as Norwegian scabies, Lloyd said.

The difference between Norwegian scabies and regular scabies is the host. Ackerman said residents are being encouraged to see their physicians immediately at the first sign of related symptoms.

He declined to comment on a time line for an anticipated resolution, saying only that efforts wouldn't cease until the outbreak was eradicated.

Ackerman suggested that the scabies outbreak wasn't isolated to just Royal Palm.

He said that in speaking with physicians and dermatologists in the area, he believes other facilities are experiencing a similar situation.

“Not everyone may be as forthcoming,” he said.

Information about outbreaks at other senior facilities in Charlotte County was unavailable Friday.

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