

# Inmate isolated during tuberculosis investigation

By KATE BAXTER, STAFF WRITER

PUNTA GORDA — An inmate at the Charlotte County Jail has been placed in isolation while officials test him for an infectious disease.

Health officials should know by the end of the week whether the inmate has tuberculosis, a bacterial infection that primarily affects the lungs.

The Charlotte County Sheriff's Office called the isolation a normal precaution, and said that only one inmate was involved.

The Sheriff's Office declined to identify the inmate, citing medical privacy laws.

All inmates at the Airport Road facility, which has a population of nearly 600, are tested for the disease, said Bob Carpenter, sheriff's spokesman. In this case, however, some officials already knew that the inmate had a history of tuberculosis, he said.

A preliminary skin test was performed on the man, but results were negative for the disease.

Given the inmate's medical history, officials arranged for more comprehensive tests such as chest X-ray and phlegm testing, to rule out or confirm tuberculosis.

The Charlotte County Health Department also said that so far there is no confirmed case of tuberculosis at the jail.

Health officials were first contacted for a possible tuberculosis investigation at the jail Thursday.

"The inmate then was showing no symptoms, but we're continuing testing," said spokeswoman Marne Cothran. "Everyone is erring on the side of caution."

Symptoms of tuberculosis include weakness, fever, fatigue, coughing, chest pain, night sweats and weight loss, according to the health department.

Inmates are among groups that are considered at high risk for tuberculosis, according to the health department. The disease is treatable and curable.

If the inmate tests positive, a six-month treatment process will immediately start, Cothran said.

The inmate would stay isolated during that time, and the health department would conduct an investigation to locate and speak to anyone who may have had close contact with him, she said.

They also would have to be tested for the disease, Cothran said.

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