23 Floridians aboard TB flight

By PHIL GALEWITZ

Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

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State health officials confirmed Tuesday that 23 Floridians, including two from Palm Beach County, were aboard the same Air France flight as Andrew Speaker, the tuberculosis patient who sparked an international health scare in May after flying to Europe.

Officials with the Florida Department of Health, working in conjunction with local and federal health officials, say they've tracked down 22 of the 23 passengers, with each initially testing negative for TB. All will be retested beginning next week because the disease has an incubation period of up to 10 weeks.

Health officials insist that the exposed passengers pose no immediate risk to the public of spreading TB.

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The one Florida passenger on the May 14 flight from Atlanta to Paris still unaccounted for was thought to be living in the Panhandle but now is thought to have moved out of state. State officials expect to reach that passenger "in the very near future."

Regardless, the passenger poses a "negligible risk based on the evaluation results to date," Florida Department of Health spokeswoman Wendy Riemann said.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said it has accounted for 267 of the 270 Americans on board the Air France flight, but it could not say how many have been tested, spokeswoman Christine Pearson said. None is known to have tested positive.
In addition to the passengers currently living in Florida, the state Health Department contacted seven others who listed Florida addresses but were living or working abroad. The passengers pose no immediate risk to the public because of the small chance they could have caught the disease from Speaker, and because even if they did, it could take many months or years for them to develop a contagious form of the disease, said Dr. Michael Lauzardo, the department's deputy health officer for TB.

The risk of transmission to passengers is considered extremely low because none of Speaker's family or others who have had daily contact with him have developed TB, Lauzardo said. "People who have contact with the passengers on the plane are at no increased risk from contracting TB compared to the general population," he said.

Speaker, a 31-year-old Atlanta attorney, became the first American quarantined by the federal government since 1963 before being taken to Denver's National Jewish Medical and Research Center, which specializes in TB treatment. Speaker underwent surgery Tuesday to remove the diseased portion of his right lung.

CDC officials in May said tests indicated Speaker had extensively drug-resistant tuberculosis, or XDR-TB, which is extremely difficult to treat.

But in June, Speaker's doctors said subsequent testing has shown only the less dangerous multidrug-resistant TB.

Q&A

State health officials confirmed Tuesday that 23 Floridians were aboard the same Air France flight as Andrew Speaker, the tuberculosis patient who sparked an international health scare in May after flying to Europe. Here's a look at the disease of tuberculosis, its impact on Florida and the Speaker case.

What is tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis is a disease caused by a bacterium called Mycobacterium tuberculosis. The bacteria usually attack the lungs but can attack any part of the body. If not treated properly, the disease can be fatal. But not everyone infected with TB bacteria becomes sick. People who are not sick have what is called latent TB infection. People who have latent TB infection do not feel sick, do not have any symptoms and cannot spread TB to others. However, some people with latent TB infection go on to get TB disease. People with active TB can be treated if they seek medical help. Even better, most people with latent TB infection can take medicine so that they will not develop active TB.

How is TB spread?

TB is spread through the air from one person to another. The bacteria are put into the air when a person with active TB disease of the lungs or throat coughs or sneezes. People nearby may breathe in these bacteria and become infected. People with active TB disease are most likely to spread it to people they spend time with.
every day. This includes family members, friends and co-workers.

**How many people in Florida get TB?**

In Florida, about 1,100 people are diagnosed with tuberculosis each year. Fewer than 1 percent of these cases are resistant to multiple drugs.

**How many people who lived in Florida were on the plane with the TB patient?**

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said that 23 of the 270 Americans on board the Air France flight with Andrew Speaker, the tuberculosis patient, lived in Florida. Here's where they live by county: Alachua (3), Brevard (1), Broward (1), Escambia (1), Hillsborough (1), Lake (2), Lee (1), Leon (6), Okaloosa (2), Orange (1), Palm Beach (2), Pinellas (1) and Walton (1).

**How long did it take to contact the Florida passengers on the Air France flight with Andrew Speaker?**

The Florida Department of Health responded quickly. As soon as the manifest information was obtained from the CDC, a concerted effort between the CDC, the Florida Department of Health and the county health departments was initiated to make contact with each of the individuals. On average, it took approximately three to four days from the time the department initiated contact to the time the person was seen by its staff.

**Have the passengers on the plane had to limit their activities or take precautionary drugs? And do they pose any risk to family or work colleagues until the results of the second round of testing are complete?**

Health officials say the individuals do not pose a risk to the public, so there has been no reason to put any of these individuals on medication or have them alter their day-to-day activities. To date, no other cases have been reported among any of the people tested in the U.S., Canada and Europe.

**What should I do if I think I have been exposed to someone with TB disease?**

If you think you have been exposed to someone with TB disease, you should contact your doctor or local health department about getting a TB skin test or the QuantiFERON-TB Gold test (QFT-G), a blood test. Tell the doctor or nurse when you spent time with this person.

Sources: CDC, Florida Department of Health
If you really think about it, climbing into a commercial jet either first class or coach (either way disgusting) with plane full of coughing, sneezing, sickly people, some un-bathed and leaning your head onto a seat that is full of germs and perhaps lice. Not to mention the baby crying and screaming along being stuck between two big fat sloppy slobs taking up the middle seat that WAS reserved for you. What kind of traveling is that????

Folks, private flying costs slightly more but well worth it. No hassles at the gates, no problems...Now the cabs and taxis that people travel in are worse!!!
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