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TB clinic opens in Ogden

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OGDEN — People with tuberculosis no longer have to travel to Salt Lake City for treatment.

The Weber-Morgan Health Department has opened a chest clinic that will focus on evaluation and management of the disease and save people a trip out of town.

"We have a very low rate of tuberculosis in Utah, as well as the county, but when we do see it, it takes a lot of time on our part as well as the patient," said Amy Carter, public health nurse and TB program manager at Weber-Morgan Health Department.

"When people had TB in the past, we used to send them to Salt Lake Valley Health Department's chest clinic, and a doctor there would monitor their progress."

Carter said the health department's medical director, Dr. Greg Gouchnour, recently traveled to the University of California, San Francisco, to receive specialized training in TB diagnosis and treatment.

"A person can certainly be treated by their primary care physician, but a lot of doctors send their patients to us because they don't feel they have enough experience to treat TB," Carter said.

Tuberculosis is a severe bacterial infection that most often attacks the lungs and can be fatal. Symptoms include severe night sweats, a productive cough, fever, fatigue and unexplained weight loss.

Because TB can mimic the flu, pneumonia, bronchitis and other respiratory illnesses, it's important to be tested.

If a person is suspected of having tuberculosis, the first step is a chest X-ray and skin test from a primary care physician. If the test is positive, the patient goes to the health department, where they can be treated with three antibiotics.

"TB is a reportable disease. Anytime we have a suspected or confirmed case, it needs to be reported to us and the state health department immediately," Carter said.

"Once they have been confirmed to have TB, patients are treated for several months with antibiotics. Sometimes it takes six to 12 months of treatment."

When treatment begins, the patient is asked to remain in isolation for up to six weeks and has exams for up to two years after treatment, Carter said.

So far, the health department is treating one confirmed case and one suspected case of TB. Last year, Carter said, a patient with TB exposed several family members.

"We had one identified person with TB and four members of the family also had active TB. We also treated multiple family members for latent TB, which means they tested positive but weren't showing any symptoms," Carter said.

Tuberculosis can affect anyone at any age. The airborne bacterial infection typically infects the lungs but can also infect other parts of the body, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"If anyone has a cough that lasts longer than two or three weeks, they should be tested for TB," Carter said.

"The incubation period is tricky, but typically, it can take up to eight weeks after exposure to show a positive skin test, and just because you've been exposed doesn't mean you will necessarily get active TB."

Carter said TB is not common in the community right now and people should not panic.

“You aren’t going to catch it through a brief encounter with someone. This is a disease that is typically caught after being around an infected person for four to eight hours or longer, so we are talking close friends and family or maybe co-workers.”

The clinic is open once a month or on an as-needed basis. The clinic is not open to the public but is for patients sent by their doctors.