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HEALTH ALERT

Nationwide Shortage of Tuberculin Skin Test Antigen Solutions

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently alerted health departments that TUBERSOL®, a Tuberculin Skin Test (TST) antigen solution, will remain in short supply until further notice. A second test antigen, APLISOL®, is only available in extremely restricted quantities.

The Merced County Department of Public Health (Department) issues this Health Alert to assist local health care providers screening for tuberculosis (TB) in teachers, other school staff, and students. It is also intended to inform school district officials of acceptable screening documentation during the shortage.

As a result of the test antigen shortage the Department has adopted the following interim policies:

1. **For the duration of the shortage, the Department will not supply TST antigen solutions to health care providers.**
2. **Using screening guidelines from the CDC, the Department recommends that providers:**
 - Defer routine testing when risk of TB exposure is low. Allocate TSTs to priority groups, such as recent contacts to an active TB case, newly arrived immigrants and refugees, HIV-infected individuals, and others with risk factors for exposure and progression to active TB disease.
 - Continue to screen teachers, other school staff, and volunteers, as required by the Education Code and Health & Safety Code.
 - Do not routinely test elementary, high school or college students for school entry. There is no state or local mandate to do so.
 - Instead of universal screening by skin test, students may be admitted provisionally using a validated risk assessment questionnaire. The *four* questions recommended by the California Department of Public Health to assess risk in children are:
 1. *Has a family member or contact had TB disease?*
 2. *Has a family member had a positive TST result?*
 3. *Was your child born in a high-risk country (countries other than the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand or western and northern European countries)?*
 4. *Has your child traveled (had contact with the resident populations) to a high-risk country for more than a week?*

If the answer to one or more questions is “yes,” then proceed with conventional TST and follow-up. If all answers are “no,” the risk of infection is comparable to a negative TST.

Contact the Department’s Tuberculosis Control program at 209-381-1023 for more information.

Acknowledgment: Adapted from materials provided by the County of San Diego, Health & Human Services Agency.