

President's Memorandum to Faculty and Staff

Office of the President
February 6, 2004
Ext. 2500

We have learned that one of our students has been diagnosed with an active case of tuberculosis. This was a student living off-campus who did not have a dining contract with Ferris State University. Our University is working closely with the Health Department to identify individuals who were most likely to be exposed to the student. As a precaution, about 100 students, faculty, staff and others who are believed to have come into close contact with the student will be notified by letter from the Mecosta County Health Department and offered free tuberculosis (TB) skin testing.

Tuberculosis is an airborne disease that is transmitted from person-to-person through the air. It is **not** thought to be highly communicable but the risk of the disease being transmitted increases the more time that someone spends in direct contact with the infected person. Annually there are about 350 cases of tuberculosis reported in the State of Michigan.

Please note that testing is being recommended and offered as a precaution. Even though it is difficult to become infected with tuberculosis, we believe the only appropriate approach is to err on the side of caution, apprise the university community of the situation, and to make testing available. At a time when attention is drawn to health issues, I want to express my special thanks to the dedicated men and women who work in the Birkam Health Center. In that context, I'd like to share with you some of what I've learned from speaking with their director, Paul Sullivan about tuberculosis.

"It is important for people to understand that there is a difference between being infected with TB and having TB disease. Someone who is infected with TB has the TB germs, or bacteria, in their body, meaning the body's defenses are protecting them from the germs and they are not sick. Someone with TB disease is sick and can spread the disease to other people. It is not easy to become infected with TB. Usually a person has to be close to someone with TB disease for a long period of time, and it is usually spread between family members, close friends, and people who work or live together. It is spread most easily in closed spaces over a period of time."

Any student, faculty member or employee who desires to be tested will be provided free TB skin testing at Birkam Health Center beginning next week. Tests are also available at the Mecosta County Health Department. Please note that it usually takes six weeks from the time of exposure before tuberculosis can be detected by a skin test.

As you will understand, we cannot release the name of the infected student. This is forbidden by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act. The student is off campus and under the

medical care of the Birkam Health Center Staff. I am hopeful you will join with me in wishing for a full and complete recovery.

Next week the University will provide several short informational sessions on campus to educate students, faculty and staff about the disease and answer questions. In the interim, please feel free to contact the Birkam Health Center at (231) 591-2614. Over the weekend this phone will be staffed from 10 am -3 pm. Additional information on tuberculosis is available from reviewing the Birkam Health Center website at <http://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/StudentLife/HCenter/> and from the Mecosta County Public Health Department at 592-0130.

Thank you for your understanding and support as we address this situation. When additional information is available I will share it with the campus community.

Sincerely,

David L. Eisler
President