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Tests have confirmed that an Orleans Parish Prison inmate died of tuberculosis, and parish officials are screening inmates and employees who had contact with him, officials said this week.

John E. Scott Jr., 24, of New Orleans, a murder suspect, died Feb. 28 in Charity Hospital, four days after he was taken from the prison to the hospital. His wife maintains he was not treated soon enough and she was not properly notified that he was dying.

Parish Prison officials announced Scott's death last week and said he died of complications from tuberculosis and bacterial pneumonia. But Orleans Parish Coroner Frank Minyard said laboratory tests would be required to confirm the cause of death. Tests showed Scott died of a severe case of tuberculosis, which is rare for a person so young, Minyard said Tuesday.

Dr. Richard Inglese, the prison's medical director, said Wednesday that the facility is following guidelines established by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention by identifying inmates and employees who came in contact with Scott, evaluating them, including skin tests, chest X-rays and other measures if necessary. So far, 20 employees and 80 inmates have been screened, and one inmate who had close contact has been diagnosed with tuberculosis and is being treated, Inglese said.

A few inmates had already been transferred to Hunt Correctional Center, which will evaluate them.

Scott was booked Sept. 2 with murder in the Sept. 22, 1999, shooting death of Benjamin Franklin Hall Sr., 45, in the 3500 block of Erato Street, New Orleans police spokesman Garry Flot said.

Scott's wife, Rachnique Scott, said last week that her husband told her he was sent to the medical ward at Parish Prison two months before he died for what prison officials told him might be a trace of pneumonia. Two weeks later, they changed his medicine, but he was still having pain, shakes and difficulty breathing. She said he could hardly stand because he also developed fluid in his feet, he told her by phone and on visits.

On Friday visits, Scott's wife said, she could see he was short of breath and had to lean on a wall to stand up, and could not speak much without gasping for air. She said he didn't want to tell prison officials how sick he was because he feared retaliation.

Inglese said Scott was screened twice for TB, once upon admission, which was negative, and again nine days before he went to Charity, which also was negative.

"It would be exceedingly unlikely for a person to develop TB so rapidly after a negative skin test," he said. "The possibility of TB was considered and thought to be extremely, extremely unlikely given his negative test."

Though still awaiting the coroner's report for details, Inglese said Charity Hospital tests indicate that a strongly depressed immune system allowed the disease to progress rapidly. "It was a disease that was extremely difficult to pick up," he said. "This gentleman had some problems that would have been very difficult for us to know about and probably he didn't even know about."

Scott's wife described her last visit to prison as "awful."

"I actually cut the visit short because he couldn't stand at the window the whole visit time," Rachnique Scott said.

A week later she went to visit her husband at the jail, but he was not there. She said prison officials did not tell her anything, but another inmate in the visiting area said her husband had been rushed to Charity the night before because he could not breathe.

She said a watch commander told her she could not go to the hospital because inmate patients were not allowed visits. She said she telephoned Charity and was told the same thing.

But two days later, the day before her husband died, she went to the hospital anyway. After going from room to room she found her husband with the aid of an employee who said Scott seemed to have pneumonia.

Prison officials later told her they notify an inmate's family when they know relatives are never going to see them again. "What I want to know is why I was never informed," Rachnique Scott said.

Scott's wife said she wants to tell families of inmates not to be afraid to speak up when the inmates are sick. "If you wait too long it may be too late."

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Bob Ussery can be reached at russery@timespicayune.com or (504) 826-3324.

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