

TB patient charged in Calif for not taking meds

May 16 2012, By SUDHIN THANAWALA , Associated Press



In this undated photo supplied by the San Joaquin County District Attorney's office, Armando Rodriguez is seen wearing a protective mask. Prosecutors say 34-year-old Armando Rodriguez, a tuberculosis patient, has been arrested for refusing to take his medication and missing doctor appointments, and is endangering public health by not treating the airborne disease. (AP Photo/San Joaquin County District Attorney's Office)

(AP) -- Authorities in California took the unusual step of jailing and charging a tuberculosis patient who they say refused to take medication to keep his disease from becoming contagious.

Health officials said Armando Rodriguez, 34, of Stockton has active

[pulmonary tuberculosis](#), which can include coughing up blood or sputum and can spread through the air.

"He is noncompliant with his [tuberculosis](#) treatment and because of this there is a danger that he may become contagious and/or develop multidrug [resistant tuberculosis](#)," Ginger Wick, nursing director for San Joaquin County, said in a letter requesting a warrant for Rodriguez's arrest.

Tuberculosis is a [bacterial infection](#) that usually attacks the lungs.

Rodriguez was arrested Tuesday and is expected to be arraigned Thursday on two counts of refusing to comply with a tuberculosis order to be at home at certain times and make appointments to take his medication.

He will likely be appointed a public defender.

The county has had more than 30 tuberculosis prosecutions since 1984, prosecutor Stephen Taylor said. It also has prosecuted a woman accused of knowingly giving syphilis to her sex partners and refusing treatment.

Taylor said San Joaquin County is more aggressive than other jurisdictions in prosecuting tuberculosis patients to get them to take their medication.

The criminal prosecutions are an extension of the practice of medicine, he said.

"The criminal cases we're dealing with generally involve drug users who are harder to treat and manage because the TB medicines conflict with [street drugs](#)," he said. "We have to throw these people in jail and treat them as in-patients. They don't cooperate as out-patients."

Rodriguez was discharged in March from San Joaquin General Hospital with four medications for active tuberculosis and agreed to take the drugs under observation by a county health official on weekdays and on his own on weekends, authorities said.

He failed to self-administer the drugs on one day, telling a nurse he had gone on an alcohol binge and taken methamphetamine and didn't want to hurt his liver, Wick said in her letter.

He allegedly refused to take the drugs on another day and then was not at home on three occasions and missed an appointment.

Each charge against Ramirez carries a maximum penalty of a year behind bars. In her letter, Wick said Rodriguez would need nine months of treatment.

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