

TUBERCULOSIS GENERAL INFORMATION

What is TB?

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by germs that are spread from person-to-person through the air. TB usually affects the lungs, but it can also affect other parts of the body, such as the brain, kidneys, or the spine. A person with TB can die if they do not get treatment.

What are the symptoms of TB?

The general symptoms of TB disease include feelings of sickness or weakness, weight loss, fever, and night sweats. The symptoms of TB disease of the lungs also include coughing, chest pain, and the coughing up of blood. Symptoms of TB disease in other parts of the body depend on the area affected.

How is TB spread?

TB germs are put into the air when a person with TB disease of the lungs or throat coughs, sneezes, speaks, or sings. These germs can stay in the air for several hours, depending on the environment. Persons who breathe in the air containing these TB germs can become infected. The germs may reach your lungs and from there they can go to other parts of your body.

What can I do to prevent the spread of TB to others?

- Take your medication as directed.
- Until Public Health says you can't pass TB germs to others:
 - Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or mask when you cough or sneeze [for more information and to obtain masks, discuss with Public Health].
 - Wear mask to medical and lab appointments.
 - Restrict public activities.
 - Restrict visitors at your home.
 - Do not use public transportation.
 - If possible, keep windows open in your home.
 - Don't spend time in closed spaces with others.

What is the difference between latent TB infection and TB disease?

A person with latent TB infection	A person with active TB disease
Usually has a skin test or blood test result indicating TB infection	Usually has a skin test or blood test result indicating TB infection
Has a normal chest x-ray and a negative sputum test	May have an abnormal chest x-ray, or positive sputum smear or culture
Has TB bacteria in his/her body that are alive, but inactive	Has active TB bacteria in his/her body
Does not feel sick	Feels sick and may have symptoms such as coughing, fever, and weight loss
Cannot spread TB bacteria to others	May spread TB bacteria to others
Should consider treatment for latent TB infection to prevent active TB disease	Needs treatment for active TB disease

People with *latent TB infection* have TB germs in their bodies, but they are not sick because the germs are not active. These people do not have symptoms of TB disease, and they cannot spread the germs to others. However, they may develop TB disease in the future. They are often prescribed treatment to prevent them from developing TB disease, once the doctor determines that they don't have active TB disease.

People with *TB disease* are sick from TB germs that are active, meaning that the germs are multiplying and destroying tissue in their body. They usually have symptoms of TB disease. People with TB disease of the lungs or throat are capable of spreading germs to others. They are prescribed drugs that can treat TB disease.

What should I do if I have spent time with someone with latent TB infection?

A person with latent TB infection cannot spread germs to other people. You do not need to be tested if you have spent time with someone with latent TB infection. However, if you have spent time with someone with active TB disease or someone with symptoms of TB, you should be tested.

What should I do if I have been exposed to someone with TB disease?

People with TB disease are most likely to spread the germs to people they spend time with every day, such as family members or co-workers. **If you have been**

around someone who has TB disease, you should contact your doctor or your local public health office.

How do you get tested for TB?

There are two tests that can be used to help detect TB infection: a skin test or a TB blood test. The tuberculin skin test is performed by injecting a small amount of fluid [called tuberculin] into the skin in the lower part of the arm. A person given the tuberculin skin test must return within 48 to 72 hours to have a trained healthcare worker look for a reaction on the arm.

What does a positive test for TB infection mean?

A positive test for TB infection only tells that a person has been infected with TB germs. It does not tell whether or not the person has progressed to TB disease. Other tests, such as a chest x-ray and a sample of sputum, are needed to see whether the person has TB disease.

What is Bacille Calmette-Guérin (BCG)?

BCG is a vaccine for TB disease that is used in many countries, but it is not generally recommended in Canada. BCG vaccination does not completely prevent people from getting TB. It may cause a false positive tuberculin skin test, but persons who have been vaccinated with BCG can still be given a tuberculin skin test. Results of the test will take into consideration whether BCG has been given in the past.

Why is latent TB infection treated?

If you have latent TB infection but not active TB disease, your doctor may want you to take a drug to kill the TB germs and prevent you from developing TB disease. The decision about taking treatment for latent infection will be based on your chances of developing TB disease. Some people are more likely than others to develop TB disease once they have TB infection. This includes people with HIV infection, people who were recently exposed to someone with TB disease, and people with certain medical conditions. Treatment of latent TB infection is with a medication prescribed by a physician.

How is TB disease treated?

TB disease can be cured by taking several drugs for 6 to 12 months. It is very important that people who have TB disease finish the medicine, and take the drugs exactly as prescribed. If they stop taking the drugs too soon, they can become sick again; if they do not take the drugs correctly, the germs that are still alive may become resistant to those drugs. TB that is resistant to drugs is harder and more expensive to treat. In some situations, staff of the local public health office or other healthcare providers may meet regularly with people who have TB to watch them take their medications. This is called Directly Observed Therapy (DOT). DOT helps the person complete treatment in the least amount of time.