

FACTS

ESW – Emergency Service Workers /
HCW – Health Care Workers



Tuberculosis

Disclaimer: This fact sheet provides basic general information only and is to be used as a quick guide, not as a complete resource on the subject. If you have any further questions, ask your health care provider or Infection Prevention and Control advisor.

TB is caused by a bacterium called *mycobacterium tuberculosis*. To get infected, people usually have to be exposed frequently over a long period of time to someone with active TB of the lungs or larynx. Healthy adults can be exposed to TB and not develop active disease. The immune system prevents the bacteria from multiplying and causing disease. This is called latent or inactive TB infection. Persons with inactive infection are not sick and are not communicable. There is a 10 percent lifetime risk of inactive infection becoming active disease and half of this risk is in the first two years following exposure.

Transmission

Infection occurs when the airborne bacteria are inhaled and the bacteria grow in the person's lungs causing an active disease process.

ESWs/HCWs may be exposed to TB in the following circumstances:

- Mouth- to- mouth resuscitation without a mouthpiece
- Close, prolonged, and unprotected contact with someone who is suspected of having TB, particularly in a confined space where there is poor air circulation, such as a car or ambulance
- Contact with fellow workers who may be unknowingly infected with TB

Prevention

Healthcare workers should always use **Routine Practices** to avoid direct contact with the secretions and body substances of all patients.

If a HCW/ESW is to have contact with a person with known or suspected active TB, **Airborne Precautions** apply. A fit-tested sub-micron particulate respirator (N-95) mask and eye protection should be worn. Place a surgical mask on the patient if tolerated. Use single patient transport only. In hospital, the patient should be in a negative air pressure room.

Symptoms

These include persistent cough, fever, night sweats, poor appetite, weight loss, fatigue, chills, and chest pain. As the disease progresses there may be blood in the sputum. If active disease develops, it takes from 2-10 weeks from exposure for signs of active disease to develop.

— *Health & Environment Facts* —

Treatment

If a worker suspects that she/he has been exposed TB he/she should contact public health. Public health follows up on all suspect and confirmed cases of active TB and their close contacts. The worker will be notified if follow-up is required. This may include TB skin tests, chest x-ray and medical assessment. Treatment for inactive TB infection may be advised if the worker has signs of being exposed. If active disease is diagnosed, appropriate treatment will be initiated.

For more information please call Public Health at 519-376-9420 or 1-800-263-3456.

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