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## TUBERCULOSIS

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### What is Tuberculosis (TB)?

Tuberculosis (TB) is caused by germs that are spread through the air when a person with infectious TB coughs or sneezes. Anyone who shares the same airspace on a regular or prolonged basis is at risk of breathing these TB germs into their lungs.

When these TB germs attack the lungs and grow, they cause damage to the lungs, and can spread these germs to other people. TB can also affect other parts of the body like glands, bones joints, kidneys, and reproductive organs. TB is not likely to be spread to others from these areas of the body.

### Infection or Disease?

You have a TB *infection* when you have breathed TB germs into your lungs and your body's defenses have stopped them from growing. Even though you are infected, you will not feel sick, and you cannot spread TB germs to others.

However, if you have breathed the germs into your lungs and those germs start to grow and become active, you then have TB *disease*. You may or may not feel sick, *but when you have the disease you can spread TB germs to those around you.*

### Symptoms

Symptoms may include weakness, weight loss, fever, night sweats, chest pain and a cough that won't go away. Other symptoms depend on the part of the body affected.

### Testing for TB

A skin test (Mantoux) can determine whether you have been exposed to the TB bacteria. It consists of an injection of a test substance just under the skin of your forearm. 48-72 hours after the injection, your arm will be checked for the size of any localized swelling in the area the injection was given. Only reactions, or swelling, of a certain size are considered positive, indicating exposure to the bacteria. If positive, you will be required to have a chest x-ray and a medical check-up.

Pregnancy is not a contraindication for Mantoux skin testing. However, the test should NOT be given to persons:

- with a known positive reaction to a previous test
- who have had active tuberculosis
- who have had a recent viral infection such as measles, mumps, rubella or influenza
- who have received the MMR vaccine in the past 4 weeks

# — *Health & Environment Facts* —

## **What are the Chances of a TB Infection Becoming TB Disease?**

If you have TB infection, there is a five to ten percent chance of developing tuberculosis over your lifetime.

However, if your body's resistance to infection or germs is lowered, you are more susceptible to TB disease.

You can reduce the risk of TB infection developing into TB disease by using preventive treatment for 6-9 months.

## **Treatment**

If it is determined that you are *infected*, your doctor will prescribe antibiotics that you will need to take for about 6-9 months. This may depend on your age and other factors. This will help to prevent you from developing active TB in the future.

If it is determined that you have *active TB*, you will be prescribed with several antibiotics for several months depending on the type of bacteria, the type of drugs used and the doctors prescription. You should no longer be able to spread the bacteria to others after 2-3 weeks on treatment.

Treatment for both infection and active disease is *free* and is provided by the Grey Bruce Health Unit.

Treatment is safe and only a few people have side effects that your doctor and/or public health nurse can review with you. You will also get regular blood tests to check for possible side effects. Tell your doctor if you are not feeling well during TB treatment.

By taking your drug treatment exactly as prescribed, active disease can be prevented or cured.

For more information, please call 519-376-9420 or 1-800-263-3456.