



FACT SHEET TUBERCULOSIS

WHAT IS TB?

Tuberculosis, also known as TB, is an infectious disease that usually affects a person's lungs. However, it can also affect other parts of the body, such as the brain, kidneys, or spine.

TB is caused by a bacteria. This bacteria spreads from person to person through the air when someone with infectious TB coughs, sneezes, or talks and another person breathes the bacteria into their lungs.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF TB DISEASE?

Symptoms of active TB disease can be:

- cough
- coughing up blood or sputum (phlegm)
- fever
- night sweats
- weight loss
- tiredness

Symptoms of TB of the lungs include:

- Coughing for 3 weeks or longer
- Hemoptysis (coughing up blood)
- Chest pain

In severe cases, the disease may lead to death if untreated.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TB DISEASE AND LATENT TB INFECTION?

Latent TB infection occurs when a person has the bacteria that causes TB in their body but they do not have TB disease. People with latent TB infection do not have symptoms and cannot spread TB to others.

Without treatment, about 5% to 10% of people with latent TB infection will develop TB disease at some time in their lives. About half of those with latent TB who develop TB disease will do so within the first two years of infection. Some people, including those with certain medical conditions or the elderly, may be more likely than others to develop TB disease following latent TB infection.

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IS IT EASY TO BECOME INFECTED WITH TB?

Close, long, and repeated contact with someone with TB disease is usually needed for the bacteria to spread. TB is usually spread to people who spend significant time each day or almost every day and in a confined space with someone who has infectious TB disease, such as household members, roommates, friends, coworkers, or classmates.

WHAT IS A TB CONTACT INVESTIGATION

A TB contact investigation is a way to find out if people may be at risk of having been infected with TB as a result of spending time with someone with TB disease.

WHAT IS TUBERCULIN SKIN TESTING (TST)

A TB skin test (TST) can be used to test contacts of TB for infection. These tests are not usually immediately accurate and are best taken 8 weeks after last exposure to a case.

For a TB skin test, a small amount of liquid (tuberculin protein) is injected under the skin on the forearm with a small needle. The person then returns two or three days later so their arm can be checked. If the person has developed a reaction (a hard, dense swelling at the site of the test), it will be measured. A reaction over a certain size is considered positive for TB exposure. Public Health follows up with any positive TB skin tests.

TREATMENT

In most cases, antibiotics are available that can treat TB disease and prevent active TB disease from developing.

If you have a latent TB infection, your primary care provider may recommend medication, also called prophylaxis. This will reduce the chance of your latent TB infection from progressing to active TB disease. All medication for TB is free in Ontario.

Sources: Public Health Agency of Canada, , Saskatchewan Health Authority, CDC.