



TUBERCULOSIS (TB) INFECTION

What is Tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by the bacteria *mycobacterium tuberculosis*. These bacteria are found worldwide thus including New Brunswick however TB in Canada, compared to some other countries, is rare. TB lives in people and is spread from person to person through the air. The bacteria usually attack the lungs but it can also affect any parts of your body, such as your brain, kidney, lymph nodes and spine.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of TB infection may include loss of appetite, weight loss, fatigue, fever or night sweats however many people can carry the bacteria for a long time and not have any symptoms. If you have any symptoms or have been around someone who has TB, you should consult your health care provider.

How is Tuberculosis spread?

TB bacteria can stay in the air for hours. The bacteria are spread from person to person through coughing, sneezing and talking when in close, frequent and prolonged contact (living with them for 6-9 months increases risk of getting TB) with someone who has *Active TB*. Thus you cannot get infected with TB by simply shaking hands; sharing food, drinks or dishes; touching bed linens or toilet seats; sharing toothbrushes; and kissing.

Active TB is when the bacteria are in your body and are growing; you have symptoms such as cough, fever; and you feel tired. When a person has *Active TB* they can spread the disease to others. Children with TB are rarely contagious and therefore often don't spread the disease.

Sometimes the bacteria are in your body but aren't growing and you don't have any symptoms. This is called *latent TB*. When a person has *latent TB* they cannot spread it to others.

TB is not likely to be spread to others when it is found in areas of your body other than your lungs or if you don't have any symptoms.

How is Tuberculosis infection diagnosed?

Diagnosis of TB infection is based on assessment of clinical symptoms by your health care provider and tests such as x-rays, blood tests and sputum samples. A screening test (Mantoux test) may also be used in the assessment. It can take two to 12 weeks for the infection to be detected with a test.

Who is at risk of Tuberculosis infections?

Anyone exposed to the bacteria can become infected however some people are at higher risk of getting tuberculosis. These may include those who:

- have spent a lot of time in close contact i.e. living with someone for a period of six to nine months, with a person that has or is suspected to have *Active TB* disease
- have weakened immune systems from either a disease such as HIV/AIDS or from taking medications after a transplant
- have lived, worked or travelled in a country where tuberculosis is very common
- live in long-term residences (for example, seniors' homes) or crowded housing; live or have lived in a correctional facility (jail, prison) ; or are homeless
- had TB in the past, but didn't get proper treatment or didn't finish treatment
- live in communities with high rates of *inactive TB* infection or *active TB* disease
- work with any of the above groups (for example, health-care workers and prison staff)

How can Tuberculosis be prevented?

The best ways to prevent TB are to: not smoke tobacco; maintain a healthy lifestyle; and see a health care provider if you develop symptoms or have been in contact with someone with TB. Early detection of the disease is important to prevent further infection and decrease illness.

How is Tuberculosis treated?

TB is treated by taking several drugs for a period between six to 12 months. It is very important for people to take the medication exactly as prescribed and to finish the entire prescription. If they stop the drug too soon they can become sick again. The best way to reduce TB is to make sure that everyone with the disease is treated with the right drugs for at least six months. Most people can be treated at home however some may require hospitalization.

What is the public health response for Tuberculosis?

Health care providers and laboratories are required to confidentially notify cases to Public Health. Public Health staff may investigate to find out how the infection occurred, identify other people who may be at risk of infection, implement control measures, ensure appropriate tests and treatment are provided, and provide advice as necessary including exclusion of infected workers in high risk occupations like persons providing direct patient care, and care of the young (daycare) or the elderly (institutional settings).

Further Information

For additional information, contact your health-care provider, local Public Health office or Tele Care 811