

## Tuberculosis (TB)

### What is Tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis (TB) is an infection caused by slow-growing bacteria that grow best in areas of the body that have an abundance of blood and oxygen. For that reason it is most often found in the lungs. This is called *pulmonary TB*; it can remain dormant (latent phase) or may grow and cause damage to the lungs (active phase). TB can also spread to other parts of the body; this is called *extra-pulmonary TB*.

### What are the symptoms of TB?

People with latent TB don't have symptoms unless the disease becomes active.

Symptoms of active TB may include:

- A cough that brings up thick, cloudy, and sometimes bloody mucus from the lungs (called sputum) for more than 2 weeks.
- Tiredness and weight loss.
  - Night sweats and a fever.
- A rapid heartbeat.
- Swelling in the neck (when lymph nodes in the neck are infected).
- Shortness of breath and chest pain (in rare cases).

### How is TB spread?

Pulmonary TB is contagious. It spreads when a person who has active TB breathes out air that has the TB bacteria in it and then another person breathes in the bacteria from the air. An infected person releases even more bacteria when he or she does things like cough or laugh.

Extra-pulmonary TB is still contagious but it does not spread easily to others.

### When is a person infectious?

Tuberculosis is either latent or active.

Latent TB means that you have the TB bacteria in your body, but your body's defenses (immune system) are keeping it from turning into active TB. This means that you don't have any symptoms of TB right now and can't spread the disease to others. If you have latent TB, it can become active TB.

Active TB means that the TB bacteria are growing and causing symptoms. If your lungs are infected with active TB, it is easy to spread the disease to others. A patient is considered infectious when the cough starts and ends when the patient has received at least two weeks of adequate treatment and has had 3 consecutive negative sputum smears collected on 3 separate days.

### How do I know if I am immune?

A TB vaccine (bacille Calmette-Guerin, or BCG) is used in many countries to prevent TB. This vaccination is almost never used in North America because

- The risk of getting TB is low in North America.
- The vaccine is not effective in adults who receive it. History of BCG vaccine does not ensure immunity.
- The BCG vaccine may cause a tuberculin skin test to indicate a TB infection even if a person is not infected with TB. This complicates the use of the tuberculin skin test to check people for TB.

Any individual with no prior history of TB disease is at risk when in contact with an infectious case of TB.

## **When is an employee exposed?**

- As per the WHCC, the MHO will determine the exposure criteria on a case by case basis when there is a suspected or confirmed TB exposure.
- WHCC will notify Operations Leader (OL) of exposure criteria and the OL will advise staff.
- Staff who potentially meet the exposure criteria, will be asked to contact the WHCC OHN to report their involvement and receive recommendations.
- Please always wear PPE if suspected or confirmed TB

There are different criteria for individuals exposed in the community. If you believe you have been exposed to TB outside of work, consult your family physician for additional follow up.

## **What happens if an employee is exposed?**

If an employee is exposed to tuberculosis, he/she does not need to alter any activities and can continue to work. He/she will be advised to self-monitor for signs and symptoms of active TB for the next 8 weeks.

Exposed employees need to contact the Workplace Health Call Centre Occupational Health Nurse (WHCC OHN) at 1-866-922-9464. The WHCC OHN will recommend post exposure tuberculosis skin testing and/or a chest x-ray.

## **What happens if an employee has TB?**

Infected employees must stay away from work and see their doctor as soon as possible for confirmation of the disease and treatment.

## **Manager/Supervisor Responsibilities:**

Suspected Outbreak or staff exposure from patient: consult with Infection Control. Infection Control will confirm diagnosis, notify and collaborate with the Workplace Health Call Centre Occupational Health Nurse (WHCC OHN). No additional action required until confirmation of disease.

Confirmed Outbreak/Staff exposure: Infection Control will inform the WHCC OHN of the confirmed disease exposure. The WHCC OHN will contact the manager and send out an exposure notification memo to the manager.

Please advise all staff members to review the information above. Infected employees or employees that meet the exposure criteria are to contact the WHCC OHN at 1-866-922-9464.

## **Employee Responsibilities:**

Infected or exposed employee: contact the WHCC OHN at 1-866-922-9464 and review the information above.

## **Additional Information/References:**

- Canada Communicable Disease Report. [Prevention & Control of Occupational Infections in Health Care](#). March 2002. Retrieved on August 3, 2017.
- BC Centre for Disease Control. [TB Manual](#). November 2015. Retrieved on August 3, 2017.
- HealthLinkBC Topic: [Tuberculosis](#). December 2014. Retrieved on August 3, 2017.
- WHCC-November 28, 2016

This information is current as of August 2017 and subject to change.