

Tuberculosis (TB)

FACT SHEET



Washtenaw County
Health Department

What is Tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by bacteria called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. The most common place to develop TB is in the lungs. However, other organs of the body can also become infected.

A person can have either Latent TB Infection or Active TB Disease. Persons with Latent TB Infection have the TB bacteria in their body. The body produces a wall around the bacteria, where TB can stay alive in an inactive (latent) state. Later in life, the bacteria can become active and multiply, causing Active TB Disease.

What are the symptoms?

Latent TB Infection:

- **NO symptoms**
- Cannot spread TB to others
- Skin-test reaction is usually positive
- Normal chest x-ray

Active TB Disease symptoms may include:

- Fever and/or night sweats
- Fatigue, weakness
- Weight loss
- Cough
- Coughing up sputum and blood
- Enlarged lymph nodes
- Abnormal chest x-ray

How is it spread?

Tuberculosis is spread through airborne droplets when a person with active TB coughs, sneezes, talks, sings, or spits. The germ is spread into the air in tiny droplets from the nose, mouth or lung fluid and is then inhaled by someone who shares close breathing space, usually over a prolonged period of time.

How is it treated?

Talk to your health care provider if you feel that you may be at risk for TB exposure or if you have any symptoms.

Latent TB Infection (LTBI) has 3 treatment regimens a doctor may recommend, taken over 3, 4, or 9 months. Proper treatment of Latent TB infection may eliminate the risk of active disease.

Active TB Disease is treated initially with a combination of four antibiotics for a minimum of 6 months and directly observed therapy called DOT is used.

How is it prevented?

People who have the greatest risk of TB exposure should be tested with a TB skin test (TST) or TB blood test (IGRA). Those at risk include health care workers, people living or traveling in countries with a high burden of TB, and people with HIV. People who have had the BCG vaccine may be tested with a TST or IGRA. BCG does not always protect against TB and usually does not cause a positive skin test after 5-10 years.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information contact your health care provider or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov.