

TUBERCULOSIS: GENERAL INFORMATION

What is Tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis (TB) is an infectious disease caused by bacteria that can be transmitted through the air. While TB primarily affects the lungs, it can also affect other parts of your body. If left untreated, TB can lead to severe health problems. But, TB can be cured by taking a 6-9 month (sometimes longer) course of antibiotics. In Manitoba, treatment for TB is provided free of charge.

How common is TB in Manitoba?

Manitoba has the highest rate of TB among all Canadian provinces, but this could be significantly reduced by addressing the underlying causes of the disease. On average, Manitoba sees around 150-200 cases of TB per year. This is a rate of around 10/100,000 which is twice the national average. The northern regions of the province have particularly high rates, with rates 10 times higher than the Canadian average. However, even though TB is preventable and treatable, this number is still too high. Fortunately, most individuals can be successfully cured with proper treatment.

How is TB spread?

TB germs are spread through the air. When someone with TB coughs, sneezes, speaks, laughs or sings they send droplets into the air that contain the TB bacteria. People who spend a lot of time every day with someone who has infectious TB, for example someone in the same household, may breathe the germs into their lungs and become infected. But it is unlikely that someone could catch TB through brief contact such as sitting next to a person on a bus. TB cannot be spread through touch, sharing cutlery or bedding or sexual contact.

What are the symptoms of TB?

People who are ill with TB may have some of the following symptoms:

- Unexplained weight loss
- Night sweats
- Fevers
- Cough that last for more than three weeks
- No appetite
- Extreme tiredness

What parts of the body are affected by TB?

TB most often causes disease in the lungs or throat. However, TB can also affect any other part of the body, such as kidneys, brain or bones. TB in the lungs or throat (pulmonary TB) are the only forms of the illness that can be passed on to other people. TB in other parts of the body is called non-pulmonary TB - and is not infectious.

Who is at risk of being infected with TB?

Anyone can become infected with TB if exposed. Some people are at higher risk for being exposed to TB. These are people who:

- Are close contacts of someone who has contagious TB
- Are from countries that have high rates of TB
- Are residents of correctional facilities
- Homeless
- Live in First Nations or Inuit communities with high rates of TB

How do I know if I have TB?

If you have symptoms that are similar to described above then you should see your healthcare professional.

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What happens if I am diagnosed with TB?

If you are diagnosed with TB that could be passed on to other people, you will be asked by your health care professional to make a list of people you spend most time with. Then they will invite the list of people to the clinic for screening for TB. They will be assessed for symptoms of TB and may be offered a skin test, blood test or x-ray.

If I have TB, will I have to stay in hospital?

Most people with TB do not have to stay in hospital, although you may be admitted briefly to confirm the diagnosis or if you are resistant to any of the drugs most commonly used to treat TB.

What is 'sleeping TB' or latent TB infection?

This is a form of TB infection that causes no symptoms and is not contagious. Some people with infection will progress to active TB disease. There are two types of tests that can be used to identify TB infection in the body: the TB skin test and TB blood tests. If you test positive on either the TB skin test or TB blood test, it shows that you have been infected with TB bacteria. Not everyone needs to be tested for latent TB infection, but those who are more at risk of progressing to TB disease:

- Have other illnesses or take medicine that weakens their immune system (ex. people with diabetes, cancer or HIV/AIDS)
- Are malnourished

Where can I go for support?

If you are affected by TB, there is help available.

A Public Health Nurse is there to support you, Monday – Friday 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. Make sure you attend all your appointments and let the healthcare professionals know if you are having any trouble taking your medication.

Call the TB Public Health switchboard (204) 940-2274 or for general health information call Health Links anytime (204) 788-8200 or toll-free 1-888-315-9257.

Websites:

Lung Association – Tuberculosis:
lung.ca/lung-health/lung-disease/tuberculosis

Manitoba Health -Tuberculosis:
gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/diseases/tuberculosis.html

Winnipeg Regional Health Authority - Diagnosed with TB Disease? Information for You and Your Family:
wrha.mb.ca/files/public-health-diagnosed-with-tb-disease-booklet.pdf

Stop TB Canada:
stoptbcanada.org

Centers for Disease Control – Tuberculosis:
cdc.gov/tb

World Health Organization – Tuberculosis:
who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/tuberculosis

Manitoba Lung Association
B R E A T H E

