

Tuberculosis (TB)

What is Tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease that most often attacks the lungs, but can affect any part of the body.

How does TB spread?

TB is a difficult disease to catch.



When a person with active TB in the lungs or throat coughs, shouts or sings, the TB bacteria spray into the air. The germs enter

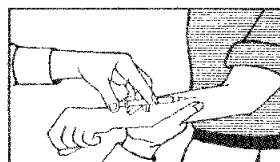
your body through the air you breathe and cause an infection, usually in the lungs. Sometimes the infection can happen in other parts of the body.

TB is caused by bacteria that are unable to live a long time outside the body. Once the bacteria dry up, they cannot cause infection. You cannot get TB from touching contaminated surfaces.

People who have TB infection cannot spread TB to others. Most people with TB infection will not get sick. However, some people do; these people have TB disease.

How do I know if I have TB infection?

A skin test on your arm is the best way to find out. A doctor or nurse will inject a tiny amount



of tuberculin solution just under the skin of your arm. It is almost painless and is not a vaccination. A nurse or doctor must see the test 48 to 72 hours later, to check for a “bump” (reaction). Only a bump over a certain size will be considered positive.

A positive skin test means you have been exposed to the TB bacteria, either through exposure to the disease or through vaccination.

You need to see a doctor for more tests, including a chest x-ray, to determine if you have TB disease or TB infection.

What if I have TB infection?

Your doctor may recommend medicines to keep you from getting TB disease and becoming sick. Unless you kill the TB germs with the right medicine, they will stay in your body and may cause TB disease later on. It takes at least 6 months to kill the TB germs.



Who is at risk of getting TB disease?

The following people are at increased risk of getting TB disease:

- those who have been infected with TB in the last 2 or 3 years
- those whose chest X-rays show lung scars

- those who are HIV-positive
- alcoholics or injection drug users
- people with diabetes or certain types of cancers
- people who are very thin or who don't eat well.

How do I know if I have TB disease?

Only a doctor can tell if you have TB disease. After a skin test, a chest X-ray and sputum tests (on phlegm that you cough up) are very important to see if the TB germs are causing illness. Some people will have symptoms and some will not.

What are the symptoms of TB disease?

Some common symptoms are:

- a cough that lasts for 2 weeks or longer, chest pain, shortness of breath
- fever
- night sweats
- loss of appetite
- unexplained weight loss
- loss of energy

Can TB disease be cured?

Yes, but it can take a long time. TB disease is treated with a combination of antibiotics that must be taken for at least six months. You must take all your medicine until your doctor tells you to stop. If you stop taking your TB medicine too soon, you will not be cured.



Does York Region Health Services do a lot of screening for TB?

Every person with active TB is assigned a nurse who will work with the individual until treatment has been completed. When necessary, we contact and test anyone who might have been exposed to the bacteria, just to make sure that the illness has not spread. Sometimes this means screening only a few people, but at times it means screening more. In York Region, we have screened people at hospitals, doctors' offices, work sites and schools.

If you have more questions about TB, please call **Health Connection** at **1-800-361-5653**.