



Durham Region Health Department **Facts about...**



Tuberculosis

What is it?

Tuberculosis (TB) is an infectious disease caused by bacteria. It usually affects the lungs but can affect any part of the body such as the lymph nodes, kidneys, spine, and brain. Two TB-related conditions exist: latent TB infection (LTBI) (See *Facts About...Latent Tuberculosis*) and TB disease (active TB).

How is it spread?

TB bacteria spread through the air when a person with TB disease (active TB) of the lungs coughs, sneezes or speaks. The TB germs can stay in the air for several hours, especially in enclosed spaces. People nearby may breathe in the bacteria and become infected. TB is not easy to catch. It usually takes several hours of close contact with a person who has active TB to be infected with the bacteria.

TB Infection (LTBI): When TB bacteria can live in the body without making you sick. The body's immune system fights the bacteria to stop it from growing. People with TB infection do not feel sick and cannot spread the bacteria to others. Many people with TB infection never develop TB disease. However, about 10% of people with TB infection will develop TB disease because the immune system can't stop the TB from growing anymore. Those with a weakened immune system, or other factors such as aging, poor nutrition, a serious illness, diabetes, drug or alcohol abuse, or HIV infection, are at higher risk.

What do I look for?

People with TB disease (active TB) in their lungs may cough a lot, cough up mucus or blood, and have pain in the chest. Other symptoms may include fever, sweating at night, weight loss, loss of appetite, and weakness. When TB spreads to other parts of the body, other symptoms may also occur. A chest X-ray and sputum test will need to be done to diagnose active TB disease. Individuals with TB disease are usually referred to an infectious disease doctor/specialist for follow up.

How is it treated?

People with TB disease begin treatment by taking 4 different medications (antibiotics). The medicine can cure TB disease when taken every day for 6 months or longer. Sometimes, the TB bacteria are "resistant" to the medication. This means that the medication is not killing the TB bacteria. In this case, alternative medications are added and the treatment will take longer. **It is important to be closely monitored by your doctor to make sure the medication is working.**

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If you require this information in an accessible format, contact 1-800-841-2729.



Medications to treat TB infection or disease are available *free* from Durham Region Health Department through five local pharmacies. A Health Department nurse will monitor and support all individuals with active TB disease. The possible side effects of taking TB medications should be discussed with the nurse, pharmacist and/or doctor.

How can I protect myself?

- Cover or sneeze into your elbow and encourage others to do the same.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water or use hand sanitizer when hands are not visibly dirty.
- Make sure that you take all the medication as prescribed by your doctor.
- Follow up with your doctor if you develop any side effects to the medication.
- Follow Canada's Food Guide for Healthy Eating.
- Avoid smoking.
- Exercise regularly and get adequate rest.
- If you are ill, stay home and isolate yourself from others.

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