

Fact Sheet: Tuberculosis

What is tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by bacteria called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. The most common place to get 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 state. Later in life, the bacteria can become active and multiply causing Active TB Disease.

What are the symptoms?

Occasionally early disease of the lungs may have few or no symptoms.

Latent TB Infection:

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

Active TB Disease:

- Fever and/or night sweats
- Fatigue, weakness
- Weight loss
- Cough
- Cough up sputum and blood
- 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?

- **Latent TB Infection** is treated with the antibiotic Isoniazid for 6-12 months.
- **Active TB Disease** is treated by a combination of two or more antibiotics for 6-18 months. It is very important that these medications are taken faithfully under careful medical supervision.

How is it prevented?

People who are at greatest risk of exposure should be skin tested for TB. Those at risk include health care workers, people living in areas with high incidence of TB, and people with HIV. People who have had BCG vaccine should be skin tested. BCG does not always protect against TB and usually does not cause a positive skin test after 5-10 years. Almost all international cases of active TB disease also had BCG. All active TB cases first had Latent TB infection. Proper treatment of Latent TB infection with Isoniazid can eliminate the risk that Latent TB infection will ever develop into active disease. Talk to your health care provider if you feel that you may be at risk for exposure to TB or if you feel that you may have the disease.

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, call your health care provider or call Washtenaw County Public Health, Communicable Disease Unit at 734-544-6770.

