

TUBERCULOSIS

Reportable Disease

Tuberculosis (TB) is an infection that usually affects the lungs, but can affect any part of the body. Not everyone infected with TB bacteria becomes sick. As a result, two TB-related conditions exist: latent TB infection and TB disease. TB can be life-threatening, but it is curable with antibiotic medications.

CAUSE

Mycobacterium tuberculosis, bacteria

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of TB disease include:

- a bad cough that lasts 3 weeks or longer
- pain in the chest
- coughing up blood or sputum
- weakness or fatigue
- weight loss
- no appetite
- chills
- fever
- sweating at night

Symptoms often develop gradually and worsen until treatment is started. If TB is elsewhere in the body, there may be other symptoms.

SPREAD

TB is spread through the air from one person to another. The TB bacteria are put into the air when a person with TB disease of the lungs or throat coughs, sneezes, speaks, or sings. People nearby may breathe in these bacteria and become infected.

TB is NOT spread by

- shaking someone's hand
- sharing food or drink
- touching bed linens or toilet seats
- sharing toothbrushes
- kissing

INCUBATION (time from exposure to onset of symptoms)

2 to 10 weeks after exposure for infection to be detected by a tuberculosis test, either a skin test or a blood test. If an infected person develops active TB disease, symptoms can occur within a few weeks, months, or even years after exposure. Less than 10% of infected persons will develop TB disease in their lifetimes.

CONTAGIOUS PERIOD

Only active TB disease of the lungs or voice box (larynx) is contagious. The contagious period varies from person to person, but usually from when the symptoms begin until the person has completed several weeks of adequate treatment. TB disease in other parts of the body is usually not contagious. Young children, who lack capacity to cough forcefully, typically are not as contagious as adults.

EXCLUSION

Child care and School: Yes, until effective therapy has been started and adherence to medication is documented. Consult with your local or state health department. A person with a positive tuberculosis test but without symptoms should not be excluded, but should see a healthcare provider as soon as possible after the positive test is detected for further evaluation and possible treatment for latent TB infection.

DIAGNOSIS

Tuberculosis is diagnosed based on signs and symptoms, physical exam, test results, chest x-ray (if indicated), and laboratory exam of material obtained from sputum, other body fluids, or tissues.

TREATMENT

Treatment for latent TB infection:

If you have latent TB infection but not TB disease, your health care provider may want you be treated to keep you from developing TB disease. Treatment of latent TB infection reduces the risk that TB infection will progress to TB disease. The decision about taking treatment for latent TB infection will be based on your chances of developing TB disease.

Treatment for TB Disease:

TB disease can be treated by taking several drugs, usually for 6 to 9 months. It is very important to finish the medicine, and take the drugs exactly as prescribed. If you stop taking the drugs too soon, you can become sick again. If you do not take the drugs correctly, the germs that are still alive may become resistant to those drugs. TB that is resistant to drugs is harder and more expensive to treat.

PREVENTION/CONTROL

- Persons exposed to active, infectious TB disease should have a tuberculosis test. If the first test is negative, another test may be needed for confirmation.
- More details on prevention can be found here:
<http://www.cdc.gov/tb/topic/infectioncontrol/default.htm>
- TB risk assessment and testing for children:
<http://cchealth.org/tb/pdf/TB-Risk-Assessment-and-Testing-for-Children.pdf>

For more information please contact Contra Costa Public Health at 925-313-6740 and visit our website at <http://cchealth.org/tb/> or <http://www.cdc.gov/tb/>