

# Tuberculosis (TB)



## What is TB?

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by bacteria called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. The bacteria usually attack the lungs. But, TB bacteria can attack any part of the body such as the kidney, spine, and brain. If not treated properly, TB disease can be fatal.

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

However, not everyone infected with TB bacteria becomes sick. People who are not sick have what is called latent TB infection. People who have latent TB infection do not feel sick, do not have any symptoms, and cannot spread TB to others. But, some people with latent TB infection go on to get TB disease.

People with active TB disease can be treated if they seek medical help. Even better, most people with latent TB infection can take medicine so that they will not develop active TB disease.

## How is TB spread?

***Although tuberculosis is contagious, it's not especially easy to catch.***

In general, you need long-term contact with an infected person that has not been treated to become infected yourself. You're much more likely to contract tuberculosis from a family member or close co-worker than from a stranger on a bus or in a restaurant.

TB spreads most easily in cramped, crowded, poorly ventilated spaces (i.e. residential care facilities). Tuberculosis can affect anyone of any age. People with weakened immune systems are at increased risk.

However, a person with who's been effectively treated for at least two weeks is generally no longer contagious. Proper treatment prevents the spread to other people.

**Remember:** *TB is spread through the air. People cannot get infected with TB bacteria through handshakes, touching door knobs, sitting on toilet seats, or sharing dishes and utensils with someone who has TB.*

## The Difference Between Latent TB Infection and Active TB Disease

A Person with Latent TB Infection	A Person with Active TB Disease
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Has no symptoms</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Has symptoms that may 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</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Does not feel sick</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Usually feels sick</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cannot spread TB bacteria to others</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• May spread TB bacteria to others</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Usually has a positive skin test</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Usually has a positive skin test</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Has a normal chest x-ray and a negative sputum smear</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• May have an abnormal chest x-ray, or positive sputum smear or culture</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Needs treatment for latent TB infection to prevent active TB disease</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Needs treatment to treat active TB disease</li></ul>

### How is active TB disease treated?

TB can always be cured with proper medical treatment. Treatment normally lasts for 6 to 9 months and all drugs must be taken as directed by your doctor. TB can lead to serious lung and other complications, if not properly treated. However, with medication taken as prescribed, there is usually no long-term lung damage.

### What is a community investigation?

When several cases of tuberculosis occur in a community, a community investigation may take place. This is to make sure that all cases of TB have been identified and to stop the spread of TB in the community. A community investigation usually means that community members are asked to have a chest x-ray. If TB is found, they are given appropriate medical treatment.

### What if I have been in contact with someone who has TB?

Contact your public health office to get more information. Someone with TB may have identified you as a contact. You may need to have a tuberculin skin test (Mantoux) or have a chest x-ray. If testing is necessary, you will be contacted by your local public health office or Tuberculosis Control in Winnipeg to arrange for testing. Careful follow-up of all contacts reduces the spread of TB.

*For more information, please contact your local public health office or call Health Links-Info Santé in Winnipeg at 788-8200, toll-free elsewhere in Manitoba 1-888-315-9257.*