

Active Tuberculosis Disease

What is tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by a type of germ called a bacteria. TB bacteria usually attack the lungs, but they can also affect other parts of the body such as the kidney, spine and brain.

TB disease can make you very sick. If TB disease is not treated with medications, it can be fatal.

How is TB spread?

TB bacteria spread from one person to another through the air.

When a person with TB disease of the lungs coughs, sneezes, speaks or sings, TB bacteria go into the air. People nearby may breathe in the bacteria and become infected. This is more likely to happen to people who spend time with the sick person everyday, such as family, friends, classmates or coworkers.

TB infection in other parts of the body does not usually spread to others.



If you or your child have been in close contact with someone who is confirmed to have TB disease, make an appointment to see your family doctor.

Does TB bacteria always make you sick?

No. Not everyone infected with TB bacteria becomes sick.

In most people, the body's defense (immune) system is able to fight the bacteria and stop them from growing. The bacteria remain alive, but they are inactive or 'asleep'. This is called **Latent TB Infection**. People with latent TB infection have no symptoms, do not feel sick and cannot spread TB bacteria to others. However it is possible for the bacteria to become active later.

In some people, the immune system is not able to fight the bacteria. The bacteria continue to grow and can make the person very sick. This is called **Active TB Disease**.

A person with Active TB Disease of the lungs, can spread the bacteria to others.

If TB bacteria continue to grow your child can get very sick. This is called **Active Tuberculosis Disease**.

How do you know that my child has Active TB Disease?

Your child will likely feel sick. Symptoms include:

- a bad cough, lasting 3 weeks or longer
- chest pain
- coughing up blood
- feeling weak or tired
- unexplained weight loss
- loss of appetite
- chills
- fever
- sweating at night

Your doctor will examine your child. This is the most important part of diagnosing TB disease.

Your child will also have one or more tests:

- A chest x-ray. X-rays can show signs of Active TB Disease in the lungs.
- Sputum test. Three samples of the mucus that comes up when your child coughs are tested for TB bacteria. This test is done at St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton. We will make an appointment for your child.
- Gastric aspirate test. A thin tube is put into the stomach to get a sample of fluid that can be tested for TB bacteria.

Some children with Active TB Disease do not feel sick. An exam and tests are needed to make the diagnosis.

Can Active TB Disease be treated?

Yes, TB disease can almost always be treated and cured with medications.

Because TB bacteria are very strong and die very slowly, your child will need to:

- ✓ **Take several medications.** The most common medications used to treat Active TB Disease are Isoniazid (INH) and Rifampin (RIF). Ethambutol and Pyrazinamide are other medications that may be used.
- ✓ **Continue treatment for 6 to 12 months.** Your child will probably feel better within a few weeks, but the TB bacteria are still alive in their body. Your child must continue taking the medications until all the bacteria are dead and your doctor says you can stop.



To kill all the TB bacteria, make sure your child takes all medications as directed and finishes the entire treatment.

Stopping the medication too soon or not taking it regularly can cause the TB bacteria to grow or become resistant to the medication. This could make your child very sick.

Support from Public Health

- TB medications are provided free of charge from your local Public Health Unit.
- A Public Health Nurse will visit your child during treatment to offer help with medications, teaching and support.

<p style="text-align: center;">Warning</p> <div style="text-align: center;"></div> <p style="text-align: center;">Infectious Diseases Clinic</p> <p style="text-align: center;">905-521-2100 ext 75253</p>	<p>Call the Infectious Diseases Clinic right away and STOP the medication if your child develops the following symptoms during treatment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• vomiting• diarrhea• abdominal pain or• yellowing of the skin <p>Your child will likely need a blood test to make sure the medication is not causing these symptoms.</p> <p>If you cannot reach the Infectious Diseases Clinic, take your child to the nearest hospital emergency department.</p>
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How can I prevent my child from spreading TB disease?

If your child has TB disease of the lungs, keep them home from school so that they don't spread TB bacteria to other people. Until your child is no longer contagious, your child should wear a mask when with other people.

After taking the medications for a few weeks, your child will feel better and may no longer be infectious. Your doctor or nurse will tell you when your child can return to school or work, visit with friends and resume their regular activities.

Where can I get more information?

Public Health Agency of Canada:
www.phac-aspc.gc.ca Click on Infectious Diseases, then Tuberculosis.

Health Canadians:
www.healthycanadians.gc.ca Click on Health, then Diseases and Conditions, then Tuberculosis.