Queensway Carleton Hospital

INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL

Tuberculosis *(TB)* Patient Information

What is Tuberculosis (TB)?

Tuberculosis is a disease that is caused by a germ (bacterium) called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* that can float in the air. TB usually affects the lungs, but it can affect other parts of the body, such as the brain, kidneys, or spine. **Active TB infection** is most infectious when TB germs are found in the person's sputum (spit).

How do people get TB?

TB germs get into the air when a person with active TB infection of the lungs or throat coughs, sneezes, or speaks. The germs can stay in the air for several hours.

- **Latent TB infection:** People who breathe in these TB germs can become infected. People with latent TB infection are not sick and cannot spread TB to others. However, they may develop active TB infection in the future. Those at risk of infection usually spend many hours every day with someone who has active TB infection.
- **Active TB infection:** People with active TB infection are sick. Those with active TB infection can spread the TB germs to others. They can also die if they do not get treatment. People with active TB infection outside of the lungs cannot usually infect others because their TB germs don't get released into the air.

What are the symptoms of TB?

The general symptoms of active TB infection include feelings of weakness, weight loss, lack of appetite, fever or chills, and night sweats. Symptoms of active TB lung infection also include coughing lasting more than 3 weeks, chest pain, and coughing up blood. Symptoms in other areas of the body depend on the areas affected.

How are people tested for TB?

A Tuberculin Skin Test (TST) is performed by injecting a small amount of fluid into the skin in the lower part of the arm. The size of the swelling is measured 48-72

hours later. A positive test only tells the person that they have been infected with TB germs. This does not mean that it is an active TB infection.

To diagnose active TB infection, the doctor will take a history to look for risk factors and symptoms. Then, a chest X-ray will be done to look for signs of TB in the lungs. Third, a sputum sample is tested for TB germs. If TB is suspected outside the lungs, other types of tests are needed.

What can I do to prevent active TB infection?

If you have been exposed to someone with active TB infection, you should go to your doctor for testing.

How is TB treated?

Latent TB Infection is often treated to prevent the development of active TB infection in the future. This will be discussed with your doctor.
Active TB infection is treated by taking several drugs for up to a year. **It is important to take the drugs exactly as prescribed and finish the medication**. If treatment is stopped, the person will get sick again and the TB germs may become resistant to those drugs. Resistant TB is harder and more expensive to treat.

What does the Hospital do to prevent the spread of TB?

Anyone who is suspected of having active TB infection is placed in a single room equipped with negative pressure air flow, which directs all air to the outside. All hospital workers entering this room will wear a special fit-tested mask. Public Health is advised when active TB infection is suspected or confirmed.

What special precautions are needed for TB at home?

Outside of the hospital, people may be placed on home isolation. Most people are placed on a DOT program (Directly Observed Therapy) where a healthcare worker visits patients at home to make sure medication is taken regularly. Public Health nurses will let you know what is required.

What do I need to know prior to discharge?

Continue to take medication as prescribed and comply with any isolation guidelines to avoid spreading TB. Public Health will be in contact with you and your family members to determine who requires testing.

If you have questions about the information in this document, contact Queensway Carleton Hospital's Infection Prevention and Control at 613 -721-2000, ext. 3777 or Ottawa Public Health: https://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/public-health-topics/diseases.aspx