

IDRS Infectious Disease Reporting System

Disease Reporting 24 Hours a Day

Columbus Public Health and Franklin County Public Health

TUBERCULOSIS

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* bacteria that are spread from person to person through the air. TB usually affects the lungs, but it can also affect other parts of the body, such as the brain, the kidneys, or the spine. A person with TB can die if they do not get treatment.

Symptoms

There are two phases of TB: latent TB infection and active TB disease:

- Latent TB infection:
 - The person has TB bacteria in the body, but has no symptoms and cannot spread the disease.
 - A person with latent TB infection will have a positive tuberculin skin test (also called Mantoux or PPD) or blood test. The test is usually positive 4-12 weeks after exposure to the bacteria.
 - If left untreated, latent TB infection may lead to active TB disease later in life.
- Active TB disease:
 - Symptoms include fever, sweating at night, weight loss, a general ill feeling, and fatigue.
 - If the lungs are infected, a persistent cough and bloody sputum (phlegm) may also occur.
 - Symptoms usually develop 1-2 years after infection, but it may be much longer.
 - A person with active TB will also have a positive skin test or blood test, but may also have bacteria present on a sputum test and evidence of infection on X-rays or CT scans.

Transmission

- TB is transmitted through respiratory droplets in the air. If a person with active TB disease coughs, sneezes, or talks, the TB bacteria get into the air, where they can stay for hours. Anyone who breathes in the bacteria may become ill. The people most at risk are those who are around the ill person on a daily basis.
- Only people with active TB in the lungs can spread the infection. People with latent infection or TB elsewhere in the body cannot spread TB.

Treatment

- A skin test or a special TB blood test can be used to detect TB infection. For the skin test, fluid is injected into the skin in the forearm. A health care worker checks for a reaction on the arm after 2-3 days.
- Active TB disease is treated with a combination of medications prescribed by a doctor. The course of treatment usually lasts 6-12 months. Latent TB can be eliminated with a shorter course of one antibiotic. This eliminates a person's likelihood to develop active TB from the latent infection.

Prevention

- ALWAYS cough or sneeze into your sleeve, not your hand. This prevents many illnesses, including TB.
- All household and close contacts of a person with active TB disease should be tested for the infection.
- Persons with disease should stay isolated until a health care provider says they are no longer contagious.

Additional Information

BCG is a vaccine for TB disease. BCG is used in many countries, but it does not completely prevent people from getting TB. Sometimes, it may also cause a false positive tuberculin skin test. However, persons who have been vaccinated with BCG can be given a tuberculin skin test or special TB blood test.

All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.



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