

The Victorian Tuberculosis Program

Information for contacts of Tuberculosis

What is Tuberculosis?

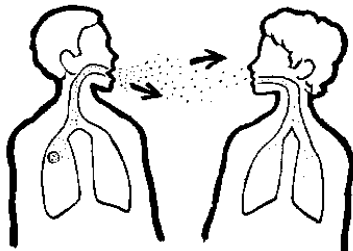
Tuberculosis, or TB for short, is a bacterial infection. It can affect almost any part of the body but most often the lungs; this is called pulmonary TB.

In Australia there are just over 1400 cases of TB diagnosed each year, with approximately 450 of these in Victoria.

How is TB spread?

TB can be spread through the air when a person with active TB disease in the lungs or throat coughs, sneezes or sings. This may cause droplets that contain the bacteria to spray into the air and infect people who breathe them in. You cannot get TB from shaking hands or from clothes, food, dishes or touching things.

TB is not highly contagious and to be infected you usually need close, face to face contact over many hours with someone with active disease in the lungs or throat. Often the people who are most likely to be infected are those in the same house or family.



There is a difference between TB infection and TB disease

Not everyone who is infected with TB germs gets sick with active TB. Only between 5% and 10% of people who are infected go on to develop active TB, which could happen many years later. The remaining 90% to 95% don't show any symptoms and are completely well; this is called latent (dormant or sleeping) TB and the germs can't be spread to others. People with weakened immune systems have a greater chance of getting sick with the disease. Only those people who are sick with active TB in the lungs or throat might be infectious to others. Active TB can be treated and cured by taking specialised antibiotics. Symptoms of active TB include; a cough for more than 3 weeks, fever, night sweats, weight loss, fatigue and coughing up blood.

If you have had contact with someone with active TB, there is no reason to stop any of your usual daily activities, including going to work or school.

How do you test for TB?

The **QuantiFERON-TB Gold blood test** or the **Tuberculin Skin Test** (Mantoux test) show if a person is likely to have been infected with TB. People who have a positive TB test can have further tests such as a chest x-ray, to look at the lungs.

People who are infected with TB can be given preventative treatment with antibiotics to reduce the possibility of the TB germs becoming active, or they can have follow-up chest X-rays to monitor their lungs.

TB grows and develops slowly, so there is no immediate risk to your health, or the health of those people close to you. From the time a person is infected to when the infection can be detected by TB testing is about two to three months. This means that the best time to test for TB is at least 8 weeks after the exposure.

Important points in summary:

- Tuberculosis, or TB for short, is an infection caused by a bacteria (germ).
- The risk of TB transmission from one person to another is low.
- There is no immediate risk to your health, or the health of those people close to you because TB grows and develops slowly.
- People who have dormant (sleeping) TB **cannot** spread TB to others.
- Only those people who are sick with active TB in the lungs or throat may be infectious to others.
- People who have been infected after they have been in contact with a TB case can be given preventative treatment, or X-ray follow-up.

If you have any further questions or concerns you can contact The Victorian Tuberculosis Program on 9342 9478 between 9am - 5pm Monday to Friday.



**The Royal
Melbourne
Hospital**

The Victorian Tuberculosis Program is a service of The Royal Melbourne Hospital

The Victorian Tuberculosis Program
Peter Doherty Institute
792 Elizabeth Street Melbourne
Vic Australia 3000

Telephone: +61 3 9342 9478
Facsimile: +61 3 8344 0781