

# Tuberculosis (TB)

## COMMUNICABLE DISEASE CONTROL

### **What is tuberculosis (TB)?**

Tuberculosis (TB) is an infection caused by bacteria (germs). It usually affects the lungs but can also affect other areas of the body. It can cause much damage if not properly treated.

### **What are the symptoms of TB?**

When people have TB, they may have symptoms such as coughing, loss of appetite, weight loss, night sweats and fever. People with these symptoms should see a doctor to arrange a chest x-ray and a sputum (spit) test to determine the presence of TB.

### **Can I have TB without symptoms?**

People may carry the TB germ for long periods of time and have no symptoms at all. In this case, a skin test will show that you are infected with the TB germ. If your body's defences are strong, the germ remains in your body without causing disease. After some time, you may become ill with TB, and this is when you may spread the infection to others.

### **How is TB spread?**

A person with TB can spread the disease to others through activities such as coughing or sneezing. TB usually spreads only through close, frequent and prolonged contact with someone who has TB. Proper treatment prevents spread to other people.

### **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 be given 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.

### **How common is TB?**

TB is one of the most common infections in the world. It is more common in developing countries than in developed countries like Canada. In Manitoba, there are about 100 new cases of TB each year.

### **Is there a cure for TB?**

TB can always be cured with proper medical treatment. Treatment normally lasts for six to nine months and all drugs must be taken as directed by your doctor. To help take the drugs properly, Manitoba offers a program called "Directly Observed Therapy" (DOT), through which a health worker supervises the taking of medication.

### **Can TB be prevented?**

The best way of preventing TB from spreading to others is to make sure that everyone with the disease is treated with the right drugs for at least six months.

There is a TB vaccine that helps prevent some cases of the disease in children under five years of age. In Manitoba, the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch uses this vaccine to protect select newborns from TB.

Another way to prevent TB is to detect the infection in its early stages, using a skin test. Doctors may prescribe medication to be taken for up to nine months to prevent the initial infection from developing into TB.

### **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.

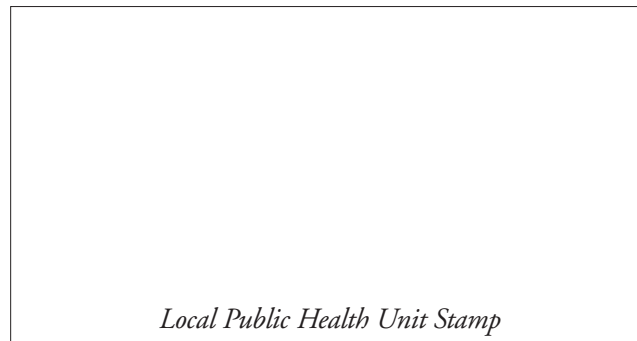
### **What if I am not treated?**

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.

If a person with TB does not take the required dosage of medicine or stops taking the drugs too soon, the TB bacteria can become resistant to the drugs already taken. This makes TB much more difficult to treat.

### **Where can I get more information?**

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.



***Keeping our communities free of TB and giving the best care to people who have TB means that all of us must work together.***

***Getting informed is the first step in working together to control TB.***