

# Information for contacts of tuberculosis

## Public health information

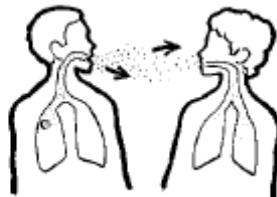
### What is tuberculosis?

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 1000 cases of TB diagnosed each year, with approximately 400 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 the disease. Only about 10% of people who are infected go on to develop TB disease, which could happen many years later. The remaining 90% don't show any symptoms and are completely well; this is called latent TB infection 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 TB disease in the lungs or throat might be infectious to others. TB disease can be treated and cured by taking specialised antibiotics.

Symptoms of TB disease 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 TB disease, there is no reason to stop any of your usual daily activities, including going to work or school.

### How do you test for TB?

A simple test called a Tuberculin or Mantoux skin test can tell if someone has been infected with the TB germ. This test involves a small injection under the skin of the left forearm. People who have a positive skin test can have further tests such as a chest x-ray, to look at the lungs, or a blood test to confirm the result. It is important to know that people who have previously had infection with TB, or even a vaccination for TB, called a BCG vaccination, could also have a positive skin test.

People who are infected with TB can be given preventative treatment with antibiotics to reduce the possibility of developing the disease, 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 skin testing is about two to three months. This means that the best time to test for TB infection is at least 8 to 10 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 TB infection **cannot** spread TB to others.
- Only those people who are sick with TB disease in the lungs or throat may be infectious to others.
- People who have had contact with a TB case who are found to be infected can be given preventative treatment, or X-ray follow-up.

If you have any further questions or concerns you can contact the Department of Health, TB Control Section on 1300 651 160