

TUBERCULOSIS INFORMATION FOR VOLUNTEERS OF THE OUT OF THE COLD PROGRAMS

What is TB?

TB (Tuberculosis) is a bacterial infection that can cause disease in any part of the body, but usually affects the lungs.

How is TB spread?

TB is spread through the air. When a person with infectious (active) TB disease coughs or sneezes, tiny TB bacteria may spray into the air. People who have close, prolonged or frequent contact with this person may breathe the TB bacteria into their lungs and get TB infection.

What is the difference between TB infection and TB disease?

TB Infection:

Most people who breathe in the TB bacteria are able to stop it from growing because their body's immune system fights it. TB infection does not cause a person to feel sick, there are no symptoms and it **cannot** be spread to other people.

People at risk for TB Infection:

- People who have lived or travelled where TB is common (Asia, Africa, Central/South America, Caribbean, Eastern Europe)
- Seniors
- People who have lived on a reserve
- People who are homeless or underhoused
- People who live or work in residential settings (jails, nursing homes, shelters)
- People who have HIV/AIDS

People who stay at Out of the Cold programs will often move from one site to the next each night. This increases their risk of exposure to someone who may have TB disease and consequently their risk of TB infection.

TB Disease:

About 10% of people who have TB infection will develop TB disease at some point in their lives. Only TB disease of the lungs can be spread to other people.

Some symptoms of active TB disease are:

- Cough for longer than 3 weeks
- Coughing up mucus or blood
- Chest pain
- Weight loss / loss of appetite
- Fever / chills
- Tiredness
- Night sweats

Who is at higher risk for developing TB disease?

- Those who are recently infected with the TB bacteria (less than two years ago)
- People who have medical conditions that affect their immune system such as diabetes, cancer, HIV/AIDS or kidney problems

Why are people who are homeless at greater risk for TB disease?

People who are homeless are more likely than the general population to develop TB disease because some risk factors for TB are common among this group. These risk factors include:

- Contact with other people who are homeless and have untreated TB disease
- Poor access to nutritious food
- Poor access to health care
- Difficulty for close follow-up by health care providers after exposure to TB
- Increased likelihood of having chronic health conditions
- Substance use, especially injection drugs and/or alcohol
- Limited access to HIV education and prevention measures, increasing the risk of HIV infection

Why should you be aware of TB in Out of the Cold sites?

The characteristics of Out of the Cold facilities often increase the risks of spreading TB. For example, buildings are often not well ventilated and clients are crowded into close quarters, typically for 8-12 hours per night.

How can you prevent the spread of TB at your Out of the Cold site?

- ✓ Encourage guests to cover their noses and mouths when they cough or sneeze. Make disposable tissue available for this purpose.
- ✓ Improve ventilation by opening a door or window.
- ✓ Look out for signs and symptoms of TB disease.
- ✓ If you suspect TB disease in a client, consult with your co-ordinator and have this person seek medical attention.
- ✓ Place each mat/cot as far as possible from neighbouring mats/cots, with head to foot, instead of head to head arrangements.

What do you do if you think you are exposed to TB disease?

DO NOT PANIC – TB IS TREATABLE AND CURABLE

If you are identified as a contact of an active case of TB, you will be notified by Toronto Public Health and instructed on what to do next. Usually this will involve getting a TB skin test, which is free of charge to contacts.

The TB Skin Test

If you volunteer for an Out of the Cold Program and have direct contact with your guests, you should have a TB skin test before starting to volunteer your work.

- The TB skin test is used to see if there is TB infection.
- A positive test requires further follow-up with a doctor.
- If you have never had a TB skin test done before, you can ask your family doctor for 2-step TB skin testing i.e. 2 skin tests one to four weeks apart. This will give an accurate skin test result.

Keep in mind that there may be a fee if documentation is required for employment/volunteer purposes.

For information about TB, call Toronto Public Health

TB Prevention Team 416-392-7420
E-mail address: targettb@toronto.ca

For information about other communicable diseases, call Communicable Disease & Infection Control:

South Region 416-338-7790
North Region 416-338-8400
East Region 416-338-7492
(Scarborough/East York)
West Region (Etobicoke/York) . . . 416-338-1521

Toronto Public Health Web Site:
www.toronto.ca/health/tb_prevention

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.daneprairie.com>.
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.