

FAQ for TB contacts in Brooks

What is Tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis (TB) is caused by a bacteria. TB infection is different from TB disease. TB infection occurs when TB germs are breathed into the lungs. When the immune system is healthy, these germs remain inactive and they cannot be spread to others. Most people are unaware that they have become infected with TB. They are not ill and have no symptoms. If the germs become active, they will cause illness and that's when TB infection becomes TB disease. TB disease will only develop in about 10 per cent of people with tuberculosis infection. This may happen anytime during their life, but the risk is greatest in the first two years after infection.

What are the symptoms of TB?

The symptoms of TB disease in the lung may include a cough that lasts more than two to three weeks, loss of appetite, weight loss, fatigue, night sweats, fever, and blood in the mucus/phlegm that is coughed up.

How is TB spread?

Tuberculosis germs spread to others through the air when a person with TB disease in the lungs coughs, sneezes, talks or sings.

Could I be at risk for TB? When anyone is identified in the community with tuberculosis disease that can be spread, AHS TB Services works with Public Health to identify all contacts. If you are aware of someone in your community with TB but you have not been contacted by public health, then you are not at risk for infection.

What is the risk after exposure to an infectious TB case?

TB is not very infectious. It is less infectious than the common cold. People who live in the same house with someone who has TB disease usually have the biggest risk of illness after exposure. Children and people whose immune systems are weak are more likely to progress quickly to serious disease, if they are infected. Co-workers, friends and neighbours have a lower likelihood of exposure; however in some cases they may be investigated.

What is the definition of contact?

An individual who has spent a significant amount of time with a person that has been newly diagnosed with active tuberculosis disease is considered a contact.

What is the process for identifying contacts?

AHS TB Services works with Public Health to identify appropriate contacts. A public health nurse will connect with the contacts for assessment and follow up as recommended by TB Services. Contacts will be assessed, tested and managed according to their symptoms and test results. This management is different for different situations

Is there treatment for contacts who test positive?

Some people with positive tests but no symptoms have latent TB infection. Latent TB infection means the TB germs are dormant. These individuals are not sick and will not spread latent TB infection to others. Treatment for latent TB may be offered to those contacts with positive testing.

How can the spread of TB be prevented?

Taking treatment for latent TB infection will lower the risk of developing active TB disease. Early diagnosis and treatment of TB disease is the key to stopping the spread of disease.

How does latent TB treatment compare to active TB treatment?

Not everyone who is infected with TB germs will get sick. Only 10 per cent of infected people will develop active TB disease as long as they stay healthy. Treatment for latent TB infection involves one or more medicines for 3 to 9 months. This treatment will reduce the risk of developing TB disease. When active TB is diagnosed, the treatment will be two or more anti-tuberculosis medicines for a minimum of 6 months

Who can I contact if I need more information? If you have any concerns or questions please Brooks Community Health at 403-501-3300 EXT 1; or visit <https://myhealth.alberta.ca> or call; HealthLink Alberta, at 811.