

What Parents Should Know About Tuberculosis

What is tuberculosis (TB)? TB is a disease caused by the bacteria *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. TB usually infects the lungs, although it also can affect other organs. TB is treatable with antibiotics.

How is TB spread? TB is spread through the air from one person to another. The bacteria are put into the air when a person with TB disease of the lungs or throat coughs or sneezes. People nearby may breathe in these bacteria and become infected. TB does not spread easily like measles, whooping cough or the flu. TB is spread most often to people who are exposed to the bacteria over a long period of time in a confined area.

There is no ongoing risk at the school. Once a person with active TB is not in the environment, there is no longer a risk. The environment is not infectious. TB is NOT spread by touching surfaces or things the ill person has touched, or by shaking hands, sharing food or drink, or kissing. The only way you can get infected is by breathing the bacteria all the way into your lungs.

How will I know if my child has TB? Children who have been in close contact with a person who has active TB should have a tuberculin skin test (Mantoux/TST). This test is used to tell if the bacteria that cause TB have infected a person. This skin test must be evaluated (read) by a health care professional two to three days after it is given, who will share results with the child's parent or guardian. If necessary, a repeat skin test may be performed in eight to 10 weeks.

If a skin test is positive, indicating latent TB infection, you will be advised to see your child's primary care provider for a chest x-ray and medical evaluation.

What is latent TB infection? Not everybody who is infected with TB bacteria becomes sick. There are two TB-related conditions: latent TB and TB disease. Latent TB happens when TB bacteria live in the body, but don't make the person sick. In most people who breathe in TB bacteria and become infected, the body is able to fight the bacteria to stop it from growing. People with latent TB infection are not infectious, and cannot spread the bacteria to others. However, if TB bacteria become active in the body and multiply, the person will go from having latent TB to being sick with active TB disease.

What should I do if my child tests positive for TB disease? TB is a curable infection. Your child will be treated with an antibiotic medication. Make sure that your child takes the medicine at the same time every day. If he/she stops midway through the prescription, then he/she must start all over again.

Are there any side effects from TB treatment? TB medications are safe. At times, your child's urine, feces and saliva may be a faintly reddish color, and your child's skin may become sensitive to the sun. He/she may also develop mild diarrhea or jaundice. If this happens, call your child's health care provider.

Talking About TB with Children -----

What is happening? An adult at school has a sickness called tuberculosis, or TB. Children are going to get checked to make sure none of you have it. The adult is getting medicine from doctors and nurses, and is being well cared for. The Vermont Health Department is a group of doctors, nurses and scientists who are experts on tuberculosis. The adults at school are working with the Health Department to keep you safe. The TB test is a little prick on our arms. Some say it feels like a mosquito bite.

What is TB? Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by germs that are spread from one person to another person through the air. The TB germs get into the air when a person with TB who is sick coughs, sneezes, talks or sings. People who are close by may breathe in these germs and become infected.

I have a cold/sore throat/stomach ache. Do I have TB? Winter is a time of year when lots of people get stomach bugs, flu and colds. Lots of us have sore throats and runny noses, but this does not mean that we have TB. TB is not easy to catch like colds and flu, so it doesn't usually make lots of people sick like those things do.

Why do I need this test? Because you were in the classroom with the person who is sick, so we need to make sure that you are not sick too. If you are sick your doctor can give you medicine that will make you better.

Does the test hurt? Some people say that the test feels like a shot or a pinch or a mosquito bite, but it doesn't hurt a lot. A nurse will come back to school a few days after you get the test to check your arm.

What if the test shows that one of us has TB? The doctors and nurses will give that person medicine and take good care of them.

Can you die from TB? We have really good doctors in Vermont who know how to take care of people with TB and keep us safe.

"Does ___ have TB?" or "I heard it was ___?" Because we respect everyone's privacy, we are not going to talk about or use people's names ...or... A lot of people are hearing different things. It's private information so we are not going to talk about it.