

# PATIENT INFORMATION

WESTERN HEALTH

Infection Prevention

## Tuberculosis, Get the facts

Footscray Hospital: 03 8345 6783

Sunshine Hospital: 03 8345 0210

Williamstown Hospital & Sunbury Day  
Hospital: 0419 311 375

### What is Tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis, commonly known as TB, is an infectious disease caused by the bacteria/germ *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. TB usually affects the lungs but it can also infect any other organ of the body.

TB was once the leading cause of death in many countries but effective treatment and prevention programs means it is now uncommon in the Australian-born population.

### How is TB spread?

TB is spread when a person with an active disease of the lungs or upper airways (nose and throat) coughs, sings, laughs or sneezes. People nearby may breathe in the germ and become infected. The germ can settle in the lungs and begin to grow. Although TB in the lungs or throat can be spread to other people, TB in other parts of the body is usually not infectious.



### High-risk groups

The number of people who get TB in Victoria is low – about 400 cases per year. Most cases are in people who were born overseas. The most common way to catch TB is if you have close contact over a long period of time with somebody who has untreated, active disease in the lungs. People who are at higher risk of developing active TB infection include:

#### **Migrants** and refugees

**Aboriginal** people and Torres Strait Is-landers (in northern Australia)

**People** living with a human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection or have acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS)

**People** with weakened immune systems

**People** with alcoholism

**People** who are older people living in institutions

**People** living in overcrowded conditions

**People** with diabetes

**Healthcare** professionals.

## What symptoms of active TB?

Some of the symptoms of active TB infection include:

**Persistent cough**

**Tiredness**

**Night sweats**

**Weight loss**

**Coughing up blood**

## How is TB diagnosed?

Methods used to diagnose TB may include:

- Medical history
- Skin test (the tuberculin skin test using the Mantoux procedure)
- Blood test
- A chest x-ray – to show whether TB has affected the lungs
- A sputum test – to see if TB bacteria are present in coughed-up sputum

## You should be tested for TB if you are:

Living with HIV or AIDS.

Living or working in close contact with someone who has recently been diagnosed with active TB

Having any TB symptoms.

## What is the treatment for TB?

If you have TB, your doctor may prescribe a course of tablets or suggest regular chest x-rays. Active TB infection can be treated with medication by a specialist physician. It will take at least six months to cure TB, sometimes longer. It is very important that you take the full course of treatment. If you don't, the TB infection might return and will be harder to cure because the TB bacteria might become resistant to the medication.

The vaccine against TB is called BCG. It is no longer recommended for the general population of Victoria.



### **Rashid's Story:**

Rashid has TB disease. He felt sick for a while. He told his doctor he had been having night sweats and coughing a lot for three weeks. He lost a lot of weight and felt very weak and tired. He was pretty scared the day he coughed up blood.

Because he had active TB germs in his body, Rashid was able to pass TB germs on to others around him when he coughed, sang, or sneezed.

**How?** TB germs are passed through the air from one person to another.

Rashid got treatment. He will need to stay on TB medicines for at least 6 months, or until all the TB germs in his body are killed.

He talked to his doctor to find out when it was safe to return to work and have friends visit him at home.

### **Some signs of TB disease are:**

- A bad cough that lasts 3 weeks or longer.
- Pain in the chest.
- Coughing up blood or phlegm from deep inside the lungs.
- Weakness or feeling very tired.
- Losing weight without trying.
- Having no appetite.
- Chills and fever.
- Sweating at night or when you are sleeping.

### **If you would like more information contact Western Health Infection Prevention Unit**

#### **Footscray Hospital**

Phone: 03 8345 6783

#### **Sunshine Hospital**

Phone: 03 8345 0210

#### **Williamstown Hospital**

#### **Sunbury Day Hospital**

Mobile: 0419 311 375

#### **Western Health**

Infectious Diseases Physicians on call

Western Health Switch: 03 8345 6666

### **Where to get help**

Your doctor

Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit, Department of Health, Victorian Government Tel. 1300 651 160

National Immunisation Information Line Tel. 1800 671 811