

TUBERCULOSIS (TB) DISEASE FACT SHEET

New Mexico Department of Health
Public Health Division (PHD)
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What is tuberculosis (TB)?

Tuberculosis (TB) is a treatable bacterial disease that is spread from person to person through the air. TB usually affects the lungs but can affect other parts of the body as well, including the brain, kidneys, or spine. TB bacteria are put into the air when a person with TB disease coughs, sneezes, talks or sings.

How is TB spread?

TB is spread when bacteria is pushed into the air inside tiny droplets by a person with active TB disease. The TB bacteria can then be breathed into the lungs of another person, causing a new infection.

Spread of TB is affected by three things:

- 1) How sick a person is:
 - The more live bacteria an infected person expels into the air, the more likely they are to spread the infection.
 - Treatment with anti-tuberculosis medication greatly decreases the spread of TB from an infected person.
- 2) Where people are:
 - Small, enclosed spaces or close living situations can make spreading TB easier. Well-ventilated and open spaces reduce this risk.
 - The “closeness” of contact affects the risk of TB being spread. For example, persons who share the same living space, such as sleeping in the same room, are more likely to be infected.
- 3) Length of time near a person:
 - TB takes time to spread. Persons exposed for longer periods of time are at higher risk. The risks to someone you’re around for a short time may be very small.

What are the symptoms of TB?

TB of the lungs may include cough, chest pain and/or coughing up blood. The general symptoms of TB disease include feeling sick or weak, weight loss, fever, chills, and night sweats.

How can you tell if you have TB?

The most common TB test is a blood test, where a sample is taken and examined in a lab. Results are usually given within about a week.

We used to commonly use a skin test where a small solution was injected under the skin on the forearm. You may have heard of that “PPD” test.

What is the difference between latent TB infection (LTBI) and TB disease?

There are two types of TB: **latent TB infection (LTBI)** and **active TB disease**.

A person with **latent TB infection (LTBI)** is not sick and does not experience any TB symptoms. Persons with latent TB infection **cannot** spread TB bacteria to others because the bacteria are not active. Persons with latent TB infection can be prescribed medicine to prevent them from developing active TB disease.

Persons with **active TB disease**:

- May have symptoms that include prolonged coughing, chills/fever, unexplained weight loss, chest pain, weakness, night sweats
- May spread TB to others
- Usually have a positive blood test or skin test
- Often have an abnormal chest x-ray

Additional information on TB can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/tb/topic/basics/>

For other questions, you can call the NMDOH Nurse Helpline:

1-833-SW-NURSE (1-833-796-8773)

<https://www.nmhealth.org/contact/>