

Tuberculosis, patient information (03/05/2016)

Information leaflet issued by the County Medical Office for Communicable Disease Control.

Why are you receiving this information?

You have, or are suspected of having, tuberculosis and you need treatment. This leaflet contains information about tuberculosis, how the disease can be cured, and what you need to do.

What is tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis (also referred to as TBC or TB) is an infectious disease caused by the bacterium *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. It often leads to pneumonia but can also affect other parts of the body, such as the lymph nodes, pleural cavities, bones, brain, or kidneys. Symptoms of the disease often appear long after the time of infection (months or years). The disease can develop quickly and can be very serious in the case of small children or those with a reduced immune system.

How do you get tuberculosis?

The disease can be spread by people with tuberculosis in their lungs or respiratory tract. The bacteria can spread through the air in an indoor environment when one person coughs and another inhales the droplets containing the bacteria. Tuberculosis is spread primarily between those in close and long-term contact. It is therefore often people in the same household who are exposed to infection. Parents can infect their children, and close friends can also be infected. It is less common for someone to be infected during contact for a short period of time or through occasional encounters such as in the workplace or at school.

How do you discover that you have tuberculosis?

Common symptoms are weight loss, prolonged bouts of coughing, night sweats, and a high temperature. The problems depend on where the tubercular bacteria are in the body. Respiratory tuberculosis often causes coughing over a long period of time. Other problems may be swelling (glandular tuberculosis) or aching (tuberculosis in the bones or abdomen). The symptoms of tuberculosis can vary from individual to individual depending on how long the sufferer has been ill – from almost no symptoms at all to very serious symptoms.

How infectious is tuberculosis?

People with pulmonary tuberculosis, where bacteria can be detected in sputum samples, may be very infectious before treatment is begun. Infectivity is quickly reduced as early as during the first weeks of the treatment. Patients who have tuberculosis outside the lungs or the bronchial tubes are not infectious. Small children with tuberculosis are almost never infectious. Tuberculosis does not infect others through clothing or other items. Nor is the disease transmitted outdoors.

Is tuberculosis dangerous?

If left untreated, the tubercular bacteria can spread and attack other organs, and this can lead to serious damage and sometimes even be life-threatening. Small children and people with a reduced immune system are at especially high risk of becoming seriously ill with tuberculosis. People with tuberculosis in their respiratory tract can infect others.

What is the cure for tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis is treated with drugs that kill the bacteria causing the disease. The treatment is long term and lasts for many months. It is very important to comply with the treatment provided by your doctor. Some of the drugs must be taken on an empty stomach (often one

hour before breakfast). It is also important not to miss any tablets during treatment. Comply with your doctor's instructions. Negligence regarding treatment may make the bacteria more resistant and thus more difficult to treat. Drugs for treating tuberculosis are free of charge, as are follow-up visits.

Contact tracing – what does this mean?

It is very important to identify those individuals who have tuberculosis so that they can receive treatment, partly to reduce the risk of damage (see above) and partly to ensure that the infection is not passed on to others. If you have tuberculosis you must therefore tell us which individuals you have been spending time in close contact with or met and whom you may have infected or been infected by. A person can be infected but not necessarily become ill.

Tuberculosis is covered by the Swedish Communicable Diseases Act – what does this mean?

If you have tuberculosis, you must organise your life so as to avoid infecting others.

If you have or are suspected of having tuberculosis, you **must follow the code of conduct** advised by your doctor:

- If you have tuberculosis which is infectious,
 - you may have to be hospitalised
 - and you may not go to work or school or attend leisure activities until the treatment means you are no longer infectious and your doctor says you can no longer infect others.
- You must make a return visit if your doctor says you should do so.
- If you move, you must notify your doctor of this.

If you have been advised to follow a code of conduct that you feel is wrong, you must contact the County Medical Officer for Communicable Disease Control at your county council.

Do you want to find out more?

Further information about tuberculosis is available at

www.1177.se

www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se