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Tuberculosis (TB) Information Sheet

What is TB? Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by bacteria that usually attack the lungs, but can attack any part of the body such as the kidney, spine, and brain. If not treated properly, TB disease can be fatal.

How is TB transmitted? TB is spread through the air from one person to another when a person with TB disease of the lungs or throat coughs, sneezes, speaks, or sings. People nearby may breathe in these bacteria and become infected. Although tuberculosis is contagious, it's not easy to catch. You're much more likely to get tuberculosis from someone you live with or work with than from a stranger.

What is the difference between active and latent TB? Not everyone infected with TB bacteria becomes sick. People who are infected, but not sick, have what is called latent TB infection. People who have latent TB infection do not feel sick, do not have any symptoms, and cannot spread TB to others. Some people with latent TB infection go on to get TB disease. People with TB disease can be treated if they seek medical help. Most people with latent TB infection can take medicine so that they will not develop TB disease.

What are the symptoms of TB? Symptoms of TB disease depend on where in the body the TB bacteria are growing. TB disease in the lungs may cause symptoms such as: a bad cough that lasts 3 weeks or longer, pain in the chest, coughing up blood or sputum (phlegm from deep inside the lungs.) Other symptoms of TB disease are: weakness or fatigue, weight loss, no appetite, chills, fever, sweating at night.

Who should be tested for TB? you should get tested for TB if you have spent time with a person known or suspected to have TB disease; or you have HIV infection or another condition that weakens your immune system and puts you at high risk for TB disease; or you have symptoms of TB disease; or you are from a country where TB disease is very common (most countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and Russia); or you live somewhere in the United States where TB disease is more common such as a homeless shelter, migrant farm camp, prison or jail, and some nursing homes; or you inject illegal drugs.

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Department of Public Health

How does the Health Department determine who needs to be tested? Because TB is not highly contagious, only certain members of a group may need testing. We determine who needs to be tested based on the amount of time you have spent with a person who has TB disease and how many days, weeks, or months this exposure has lasted. A TB investigation uses concentric circles to determine how many people need to be tested. If the first group (circle 1) shows no spread of the disease, the investigation is ended. If there are cases, the investigation expands to a second group (circle 2). If there are positive test results in this group, the investigation will expand to a third group (circle 3). This will be the process until we reach a circle where fewer positive cases of TB are identified than what would be expected. If you or your child is not in one of these groups (circles) but you still want to have a test performed, you may always contact your primary care physician or the City of El Paso Department of Public Health Immunization Program at 212-6555. Skin test are provided by the Immunization Program at a cost of \$9.

What is the process if my child or I tests positive for TB? A positive TB test will be the first part of our process which may also include chest x-rays, obtaining sputum samples, and beginning treatment medication. All of this will be explained to you by one of our clinicians if you do test positive.

The Department of Public Health continues to provide information and updates via the TB Investigation webpage. It can be found at www.EPHealth.com. For more information you may also contact the TB Program at 915-212-6609.

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