



# Tuberculosis Frequently Asked Questions

Fact  
Sheet

Tuberculosis is a serious disease but is rare, preventable and treatable with antibiotics. It is spread only through the air from one person to another. TB cannot be spread by casual contact like kissing, shaking hands or hugging or through sharing food, drinks or utensils. Also, it cannot be spread via surfaces.

The only way to contract the disease is to breathe in the bacteria by being extremely close to an infected person for a long period of time while they are coughing, sneezing, singing, or talking. The only way to contract the disease is to be extremely close to an infected person when they cough, sneeze, sing, or talk and you breathe in the bacteria.

Health Department officials are identifying individuals that may have been in close contact with the infected student to ensure that they are evaluated, tested, and treated appropriately.

## How is Tuberculosis spread?

*When a person with tuberculosis coughs, sneezes, sings or talks, droplets containing the bacteria are released into the air.*

*TB is only spread through the air, and the only way to contract the disease is by breathing in the bacteria of someone that is infected. People with TB disease are most likely to spread it to people they spend time with every day. This includes family members, friends, and coworkers or schoolmates.*

*TB cannot be spread through food or drink, through clothing, or through skin contact, such as shaking hands or hugging. Also, it cannot be spread via surfaces.*

## What are the signs and symptoms of TB?

*Not everyone infected with TB bacteria becomes sick. As a result, two TB-related conditions exist: latent TB infection (LTBI) and TB disease.*

*An individual with latent TB infection will not feel sick and would only know they were infected by a positive skin or blood test result. Most people with a latent TB infection may go their entire life without developing TB disease. Individuals with latent TB infection do not spread their infection.*

*Individuals with TB disease generally have a combination of some of the following symptoms: a bad cough that lasts 3 or more weeks, chest pain, coughing up blood or mucus from deep in the lungs, weakness/fatigue, weight loss, loss of appetite, night sweats, fever, or chills.*

## How is tuberculosis treated?

*Tuberculosis is curable and treatment involves a multi-drug antibiotic regimen that lasts six-to-nine months.*

*A person with TB will become non-infectious within a few days to weeks of effective treatment and will be able to return to normal activities without risk to others while completing treatment.*

### Who is at highest risk for developing tuberculosis disease?

*Some groups are at high risk for developing TB disease. These include:*

*Babies and young children*

*People with HIV infection*

*People who inject drugs*

*Elderly people*

*People with other diseases that weaken the immune system*

*People who were not properly treated for TB in the past*

*People who are recently infected with TB (<2 years)*

### How common is TB?

*There are very few cases of tuberculosis in Allegheny County. Over the last 12 years, the number of new cases in the county has ranged from eight (8) to 24 a year. There were 11 cases in 2019, and there have been 11 so far in 2020. The incidence rate of TB in Allegheny County in 2019 was 0.9 per 100,000 residents, which is far below the statewide incidence rate of 1.5 per 100,000 residents and even lower than the national rate of 2.7.*