

TB VETS

TUBERCULOSIS FACT SHEET

Tuberculosis (or TB) is a contagious disease spread like the common cold. TB is caused by organisms called bacilli that infect the lungs. When a person with active TB coughs, sneezes, laughs or spits the bacilli are released into the air. Anyone nearby is then at risk of breathing these organisms into their own lungs and contracting the disease. When bacilli attack the lungs and grow, they cause damage to the lungs.

Dormant TB occurs when a person has breathed TB bacilli into their lungs but their body's defenses have stopped them from growing. Some people who are exposed to tuberculosis never develop symptoms because their immune systems are able to fight the disease. A person with dormant TB does not feel sick, is not contagious, but will have TB in their system for the rest of their life.

Active TB occurs when the body's defenses can no longer stop the TB from growing. Some signs of active TB include weight loss, fatigue, night sweats, fever, chest pain, shortness of breath and have a persistent cough.

Drug treatment is required to stop the disease from progressing and to reduce the risk of spreading TB to others. Today the majority of TB cases can be brought under control with the proper drug treatment.

Drug-resistant TB occurs when a patient stops taking the medication when they start to feel better or if the drugs are not easy to obtain. The bacilli in an infected person's lungs may then develop resistance to TB-fighting drugs. Other people they infect will then have the same drug-resistant strain. While drug-resistant TB is treatable, it can take up to two years of extensive chemotherapy to fight the disease.

Interesting Facts

- Every year 2 million people around the world die because of TB – someone dies every 20 seconds.
- Left untreated, a person with active TB can infect 10-15 people each year.
- It is estimated that 17,000 people in Canada are infected with active TB.
- In Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, a TB Outreach Worker visits 10-30 tuberculosis patients on a daily basis to ensure they are taking their medications to help stop the spread of the disease.

The Future of TB

- The World Health Organization warns that at today's rate of infection, over half of the world's population could be infected with tuberculosis within the next 20 years.
- Bill Gates' charitable foundation will boost its funding for TB eradication from \$300 million to \$900 million USD during the next decade.
- TB Vets will continue to work to fund local tuberculosis research, employ a TB Outreach Worker in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, support the training of Respiratory Therapists at the Thompson Rivers University and continue to raise awareness of the disease.