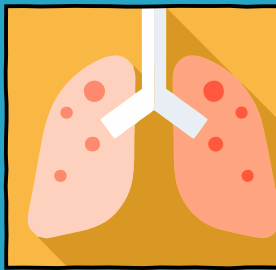


Health guide Tuberculosis (TB)



What is Tuberculosis (TB)?

TB is an airborne bacterial infection that most commonly affects the lungs but can also affect other parts of the body. The disease is now quite rare and more commonly affects specific areas and populations:

- People who have experience of homelessness, addiction and imprisonment, whose immunity is weakened by poorer nutrition, drug and alcohol use and stress.
- People who have diseases that weaken their immune system such as untreated HIV, diabetes, kidney disease, and people who receive drugs that suppress the immune system such as steroids and treatments for rheumatoid arthritis or Crohn's disease.
- Areas of poverty and high deprivation.
- People who come from parts of the world where TB is still common.

Anyone can get TB but only people with lung TB are infectious.

How does someone get TB?

People with infectious TB exhale infectious bugs out when we breath, cough, or sneeze. These droplets can remain airborne for hours in poorly ventilated spaces. If someone breaths in the floating bugs, one of three things happens:

- The immune system successfully kills the bugs and that's the end of that.
- The immune system is able to suppress the bugs but not kill them – this is called TB infection, which can sometimes reactivate years after infection. TB infection is treatable with a course of specialised antibiotics to prevent future disease.
- The immune system loses the fight, and the bugs begin to replicate, causing damage to the affected area and making the person unwell. TB disease needs to be diagnosed and treated as soon as possible with a full course of specialised antibiotics.

TB is not as infectious as many other diseases and most cases are because of being exposed to someone who has it in a shared airspace over a long period of time.

The key to eliminating TB is to ensure cases are diagnosed and fully treated and people who are infected are diagnosed and treated to prevent future disease.

What are the symptoms of TB?

Symptoms of TB usually come on gradually so they can be hard to notice. They are also highly varied as the disease can affect any part of the body. The most common symptoms include:

- Weight loss.
- Tiredness, loss of appetite and feeling generally unwell.
- A cough that lasts more than 3 weeks – you may cough up mucus (phlegm) or mucus with blood in it.
- A high temperature or night sweats.

We realise these can be symptoms you may experience anyway when you are experiencing homelessness, struggling with poor health or using substances. You should go and see your GP if you're concerned about any symptoms.

Everyone has the right to see a GP. You do not need ID or a fixed address to register with a GP and your immigration status does not matter. Always remember your visit to the GP is confidential.

How is TB treated?

The great news is that TB is curable. It is treated by a long course of daily antibiotics (for a minimum of 6 months) prescribed by a specialist doctor. The antibiotics need to be taken every day in order for them to work. Missing doses means there is a risk of developing resistance to the medication, so it is important you follow the instructions from the TB Team. You will be allocated a TB Nurse Specialist, who will support you to complete the treatment and get well.

For more information on TB:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/tuberculosis-tb/>



Are you in London?

In London you can get on the Find&Treat screening van for a quick and confidential chest x-ray. It's very safe, takes 2 minutes and can spot TB early to prevent lung damage and serious disease. The van visits hostels, day centres and street kitchens across London and offers a range of other health services and support. If you are worried about yourself or a friend and want to get a check-up, call the team on **0203 447 9842** or ask your support worker or service to get in touch with them.

It may be helpful to tell the medical professional if you:

- Are worried or have experienced any sexual violence or other trauma, which may make the appointment difficult for you.
- Have a physical or mental health condition.
- Have had a bad experience with medical appointments before and you can let them know what they can do to make you feel more comfortable.
- Would like to be seen by a medical professional of a certain gender.
- May have issues coming to all, or some of, the sessions.

Everyone has the right to good health and to access healthcare. People experiencing homelessness face health inequalities, they are often excluded from information and services. That's why Groundswell produces accessible health guidance for people experiencing homelessness, so they can make informed decisions about their health.

All our health guides are created alongside people with experience of homelessness and reviewed by relevant professionals.



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