

TB RISK MANAGEMENT GUIDANCE NOTE

Health and Safety Information for Healthcare Workers Potentially Exposed to Tuberculosis

Tuberculosis or TB is a disease caused by bacteria, which can affect any part of the body, often the lungs.

Some groups of healthcare workers are at higher risk of picking up the infection from infected people. These include:

- Nurses and Doctors on respiratory medicine and infectious diseases wards
- Nurses and Doctors working in respiratory medicine and infectious disease outpatient clinics
- Pathologists
- Laboratory workers handling specimens
- Mortuary room technicians

Although, not all types of TB are infectious, pulmonary TB (infection of the lungs) is normally infectious. TB is not easy to catch if you are fit and healthy and have previously had BCG immunisation.

The risk of picking up the infection depends on a number of factors:

- The symptoms of the person, especially if coughing with sputum (phlegm)
- Whether the affected individual has had treatment or not
- Significant exposure is close contact with pulmonary TB, usually more than 8 hours in the same room, or mouth-to-mouth resuscitation or repeated chest physiotherapy

Types of TB that do not affect the lungs are not usually considered infectious.

You can reduce the risk of picking up infection by

- Employing good hand hygiene and control of infection procedures
- Using personal protective equipment when indicated following risk assessment
- Discussing BCG immunisation with Occupational Health

Symptoms, which require further investigation, are:

- Persistent cough for 2 weeks or more (in someone who does not normally have a cough)
- Coughing up blood
- Fever/sweating, especially at night
- Unexplained weight loss of more than a few pounds
- Sometimes lumps in the neck or swelling of the joints

These symptoms can have other causes for which you should consult your GP but they could be due to TB. If you experience any of the above symptoms please contact the Occupational Health Service for advice on 01224 553663 or extension 53663 if internal.