

## Information leaflet for contacts of people with Tuberculosis (TB)

### What is tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by a germ called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. TB usually affects the lungs but can affect other parts of the body.

### What are the symptoms of active TB disease?

TB disease develops slowly in the body. It may take several months for the symptoms to appear. Any of the following symptoms may be a sign of TB:

- Fever and night sweats
- Cough for more than three weeks
- Losing weight
- Blood in your sputum (phlegm) at any time

If you develop these symptoms, visit your GP (doctor) for advice.

### How is TB spread?

The TB germ is usually spread in the air. Some people with TB of the lungs have infectious TB. This means that they can pass TB to other people. The germ gets into the air when someone who has infectious TB coughs, sneezes, talks or sings. Usually you need to be in close contact for a long time with someone who has infectious TB to become infected with the TB germ yourself.

### Can anyone get TB?

Yes, anyone can get TB but you are at greater risk if you live in the same house as the person who is sick or if you are in very close contact with them. Only a small number of people who breathe in the TB germ get sick. This can happen within a couple of months of exposure or many years later.

### What is the difference between latent TB infection and active TB disease?

When TB germs first enter your body, they cause latent TB infection. This means that the germs are 'asleep' in your body. If you do not have treatment, latent TB infection can become active TB disease.

Latent TB Infection	Active TB Disease
TB germs are 'asleep' in your body. This stage can last for a very long time – even many years.	TB germs are active and spreading. They are damaging your body.
You don't look or feel sick. Your chest X-ray is usually normal.	You usually feel sick. Your doctor will do special tests to find where TB is harming your body.
You can't spread TB to other people.	If the TB germs are in your lungs, you can spread TB to other people by coughing, sneezing, talking or singing.
Usually treated by taking one medicine for up to 9 months.	Treated by taking 3 or 4 medicines for at least 6 months.

### **What is contact tracing and why is it necessary?**

People who have been in close contact with someone who has had TB may need to be checked for TB themselves. If you have been identified as someone who has been in contact with a TB patient, a member of the Department of Public Health will get in touch with you. This is called contact tracing. The aim of contact tracing is to stop the spread of TB and to reduce illness among those who have been in contact with TB patients.

### **What is a 'contact' of TB?**

A 'contact' of TB is someone who has spent a lot of time with somebody who has TB. Each situation is different and will be assessed by the Department of Public Health.

### **What happens if I am told I am a TB 'contact'?**

We will ask you to attend a TB contact tracing clinic. This may be held in your workplace or school but is more likely to be in the hospital outpatient clinic.

### **What happens at the TB contact tracing appointment?**

The doctor will take your medical history and carry out tests. The first test is usually a skin test (called a Mantoux test). It involves a small injection into your arm. The results of this test will be read in 2-3 days. The doctor will decide what other tests you need based on this result.

### **Will I need treatment if I have been in contact with someone with TB?**

- If you have active TB disease, you will be sent to a doctor for TB treatment.
- If you have latent TB infection, you may be advised to take a course of medicine.

### **Can I carry on with my day to day activities?**

There is no reason to stop any of your daily activities. Even if you have been in contact with someone who has infectious TB, you have only a small chance of developing TB disease. You have an even smaller chance of having the type of TB that can be passed on to other people. There is no need to take time off work or school.

If you have any more questions, please talk with the doctor at the clinic.

**You can also contact your local Public Health Department at**

For more information about TB, visit [www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie) and type TB into the search box at the top right-hand corner of the screen.

