What is tuberculosis and how is it spread?

Tuberculosis is an infectious disease that usually attacks the lungs, but can attack any part of the body. It is caused by Mycobacterium tuberculosis. Transmission of tuberculosis is by inhalation of droplet nuclei produced when a person with infectious pulmonary or laryngeal tuberculosis coughs, laughs, sneezes, sings or talks. If another person breathes in these droplet nuclei, there is a chance that he/she may become infected with tuberculosis.

What is considered to be an exposure to tuberculosis?

A person is considered to be exposed if there is shared breathing space with someone with infectious pulmonary or laryngeal tuberculosis at a time when the infectious person is not wearing a mask and the other person is not wearing an N95 respirator. Usually a person has to be in close contact with someone with infectious tuberculosis for a long period of time to become infected; however, some people do become infected after short periods, especially if the contact is in a closed or poorly ventilated space.

What is the incubation period of tuberculosis?

From infection to development of a positive TB skin test reaction (the incubation period) is approximately 2 to 12 weeks. The risk for developing active disease is the highest in the first two years after infection and development of a positive TB skin test reaction.

What if my tuberculin skin test is positive after I have been exposed?

If you are found to have a positive TB skin test you will be evaluated for signs and symptoms of active tuberculosis (cough lasting for more than three weeks, bloody sputum, fever, night sweats, weight loss, loss of appetite, fatigue). If none of these are present, you will have a chest X-ray taken. If there is no indication that you have active infectious tuberculosis, you will be considered to have latent tuberculosis and evaluated to determine if taking isoniazid (INH) is appropriate for you. If you have latent tuberculosis, you are not contagious and cannot pass the tuberculosis germ to other people. If signs or symptoms of active tuberculosis are present or if your chest X-ray is abnormal, you will be referred to the Fresno County Department of Public Health for further evaluation.

Source: [http://www.vanderbilt.edu/HRS/wellness/OHC/ohctb.pdf](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/HRS/wellness/OHC/ohctb.pdf)

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