

# MISSOULA CITY-COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT DISEASE FACT SHEETS



## TUBERCULOSIS

### WHAT IS TUBERCULOSIS?

TUBERCULOSIS (TB) IS A BACTERIAL DISEASE USUALLY AFFECTING THE LUNGS. OTHER PARTS OF THE BODY CAN ALSO BE AFFECTED, FOR EXAMPLE LYMPH NODES, KIDNEYS, BONES, JOINTS, ETC.

### WHO GETS TUBERCULOSIS?

TUBERCULOSIS CAN AFFECT ANYONE OF ANY AGE. PEOPLE WITH WEAKENED IMMUNE SYSTEMS ARE AT INCREASED RISK.

### HOW IS TUBERCULOSIS SPREAD?

TUBERCULOSIS IS SPREAD THROUGH THE AIR WHEN A PERSON WITH UNTREATED TB COUGHS OR SNEEZES. SPENDING A LONG PERIOD OF TIME WITH A PERSON WITH UNTREATED TB USUALLY IS NECESSARY FOR INFECTION TO OCCUR.

### WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LATENT TUBERCULOSIS INFECTION AND TUBERCULOSIS DISEASE?

LATENT TUBERCULOSIS INFECTION (LTBI) MEANS THE PERSON HAS THE TB GERM IN THEIR BODY (USUALLY LUNGS), BUT DOES NOT SHOW SYMPTOMS. ACTIVE TUBERCULOSIS DISEASE MEANS THAT THE PERSON HAS SYMPTOMS, A REACTION TO A SKIN TEST AND/OR ORGANISMS FOUND IN THE DISCHARGES OF COUGHING OR IN ANOTHER PART OF THE BODY. TUBERCULOSIS MAY LAST FOR A LIFETIME AS AN INFECTION, NEVER DEVELOPING INTO DISEASE.

### WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF TUBERCULOSIS?

THE SYMPTOMS OF TB INCLUDE A FEVER, NIGHT SWEATS, TIREDNESS, WEIGHT LOSS AND A CONSTANT COUGH. SOME PEOPLE MAY NOT HAVE OBVIOUS SYMPTOMS.

### HOW SOON DO SYMPTOMS APPEAR?

MOST PEOPLE INFECTED WITH THE GERM THAT CAUSES TB NEVER DEVELOP ACTIVE TB. IF ACTIVE TB DOES DEVELOP, IT CAN OCCUR TWO TO THREE MONTHS AFTER INFECTION OR YEARS LATER.

### WHEN AND FOR HOW LONG IS A PERSON ABLE TO SPREAD TUBERCULOSIS?

A PERSON WITH LATENT TB INFECTION, BUT NOT DISEASE, CANNOT SPREAD THE INFECTION TO OTHERS, SINCE THERE ARE NO TB GERMS IN THE SPUTUM. A PERSON WITH TB DISEASE MAY REMAIN CONTAGIOUS UNTIL HE/SHE HAS BEEN ON APPROPRIATE TREATMENT FOR SEVERAL WEEKS.

### WHAT IS THE TREATMENT FOR TUBERCULOSIS?

PEOPLE WITH LATENT TB INFECTION SHOULD GET PREVENTIVE THERAPY, WHICH USUALLY INCLUDES TAKING MEDICATION FOR SEVERAL MONTHS. PEOPLE WITH ACTIVE TB DISEASE MUST COMPLETE TREATMENT FOR SIX MONTHS OR MORE. SEVERAL TYPES OF MEDICATIONS ARE GIVEN AND A PHYSICIAN WILL DECIDE THE EXACT MEDICATION PLAN.

### WHAT CAN BE THE EFFECT OF NOT BEING TREATED FOR TUBERCULOSIS?

IN ADDITION TO SPREADING THE DISEASE TO OTHERS, AN UNTREATED PERSON MAY BECOME SEVERELY ILL OR DIE.

### WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF TUBERCULOSIS?

THE MOST IMPORTANT WAY TO STOP THE SPREAD OF TUBERCULOSIS IS FOR TB PATIENTS TO COVER THE MOUTH AND NOSE WHEN COUGHING, AND TO TAKE ALL THE TB MEDICINE EXACTLY AS PRESCRIBED BY THE PHYSICIAN.