



**Tuberculosis Control Branch
STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**
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Questions and Answers about Tuberculosis (TB)

What is TB?

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by bacteria. The bacteria usually attack the lungs, but can affect other parts of the body. TB disease is usually curable, but if not treated properly, it can be fatal.

How is TB spread?

TB can be spread through the air from one person to another. The bacteria are put into the air when a person with active TB disease of the lungs coughs or sneezes. People nearby may breathe in these bacteria and become infected. People with active TB disease are most likely to spread it to people they spend time with every day like family members, friends, and classmates. TB is not usually spread to persons who spend a small amount of time with a person who has active TB disease. TB cannot be spread by sharing paper, pens, books, food, utensils, drinking glass, clothes, handshakes, or sharing the same toilet.

What is latent TB infection?

TB bacteria are breathed in and the body is able to contain the bacteria to keep them from spreading. The bacteria become inactive or dormant, but they can remain in the body and can become active later in life. People with latent TB infection do not feel sick and cannot spread TB to others. It is highly recommended that a person who has latent TB infection take medicine to treat the infection and prevent them from developing active TB disease in the future.

What is active TB disease?

This occurs when TB bacteria are breathed in and the body's immune system is not able to contain the bacteria to keep them from spreading. The bacteria become active, grow in the body, and cause active TB disease. General symptoms of active TB disease include feeling weak or sick, weight loss, fever, and/or night sweats. Symptoms of TB of the lungs may include coughing, chest pain, and/or coughing up blood. If the bacteria grow in the lungs, it may be spread through the air.

How do I get tested for TB?

The first step is to get a TB skin test. This test is usually done on the arm. A small needle is used to place testing material, called purified protein derivative (PPD), under the skin. In two or three days, a health care worker will check to see if there is a reaction to the test.

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What does a “negative” TB skin test result mean?

If the TB skin test is “negative,” it usually means a person is not infected with TB. A person with a negative TB skin test usually does not need further testing.

What does a “positive” TB skin test result mean?

If the TB skin test is “positive,” it usually means that a person has been infected with TB. It does not necessarily mean that a person has TB disease. A chest X-ray is then needed to see if the TB has spread in the lungs, causing pulmonary TB disease. If the chest X-ray is negative for TB disease, then a person has latent TB infection. Again, it is highly recommended that a person who has latent TB infection take medicine to treat the infection and prevent them from developing active TB disease in the future.

How do I know if I was exposed?

The Department of Health (DOH) has conducted a thorough investigation, evaluated the situation, and identified those students and faculty who have had contact in the same classroom with the student who has active TB disease. These students and faculty will receive guidance from the DOH for any testing and follow-up needed.

Why aren’t all the students and faculty being tested?

At this time, only those students and faculty whom the DOH has identified as having contact in the same classroom with the student need to be tested. If you have any questions regarding this, please contact the Hawaii Tuberculosis Control Program at 832-5731.

I received a letter that states that I do not need to be tested for TB. I want to be tested to see if I have been infected. What should I do?

At this time, the DOH has determined that you do not need to be tested for TB. If you still have concerns, you may go to your physician to be tested.

Where can I get more information?

Feel free to call the Hawaii Tuberculosis Control Program at 832-5731. You can also visit the following websites:

- Hawaii State Department of Health Tuberculosis Control Program
<http://www.hawaii.gov/health/tb>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Division of Tuberculosis Elimination
<http://www.cdc.gov/tb/default.htm>