

### **What is Tuberculosis**

Tuberculosis, often referred to as TB, is a curable disease caused by a germ (bacteria) called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. TB can affect any part of the body but is most common in the lungs. TB is spread when a person who has TB of the lungs coughs, sings or sneezes. This is of particular importance if this happens in a room, office or classroom where air circulation may be restricted (rooms with closed windows and doors), as people present may inhale the bacteria over a long period of time. Many of those who come in contact with the bacteria may never become infected. Others will develop their own immunity to TB without showing any signs of infection. Only about 5 % - 10% of those who are infected with the TB bacteria will develop the disease.

### **Is every person who gets TB infectious (can they transmit the bacteria to others)?**

No. TB can be either opened or closed. Open TB is considered infectious and occurs when the TB bacteria in the lungs breaks through the air passages, from where it can be expelled into the air when coughing, sneezing or singing. Closed TB is not considered infectious as it is contained for example in the kidney or lymph nodes and cannot be expelled directly into the air unless disturbed for example during a surgical procedure on the affected area.

### **Will my family be affected?**

TB like many infections may be transmitted to your family, friends or colleagues, as you are most likely to have shared for example the same room, house or office. These persons are considered as a 'close contact'. The Public Health Doctor will make contact with all those who may have had close contact with you and will determine if your family, friends and colleagues require screening for TB.

### **What tests will be carried out?**

Your doctor will probably recommend a chest x-ray. If you are producing phlegm (sputum) you will be requested to give three sputum samples on three consecutive days, usually in the morning, for examination in a laboratory. Also, a visit to a Respiratory Physician may be recommended

### **Can TB be treated?**

Yes. Treatment is always with oral drugs for a minimum period of about six months. It is extremely important to take all the prescribed drugs every day until the end of the treatment period. If you have difficulty taking the tablets, please call or visit your doctor immediately for advice. If you stop taking your tablets and/or take them intermittently without speaking with your doctor, there is a

high risk that the TB bacteria may develop resistance to your prescribed TB drugs. Ultimately, this will make it more difficult to treat your TB.

### **When can I return to work?**

Your Respiratory Physician and/or your doctor will advise you on when you can return to work. The length of time each person will be out of work may vary.

### **Entitlements?**

The drugs used to treat you are free

### **Will I have to be admitted to hospital?**

Sometimes people with TB are admitted to hospital when they are sick. If you have TB let the doctor at the hospital know. At St James's Hospital, if you have or are suspected of having open TB you may be placed in a single room with en-suite toilet and shower. The room has special ventilation features and will be entered via a lobby. The lobby door and room door should not be open at the same time (close one door before opening the other door). Staff entering the room will be wearing a respiratory mask.

### **How long will I have to stay in the room?**

When it is confirmed that your TB is no longer infectious you may be moved to a standard room or the restriction of opening both your room doors together will no longer be required.

### **Can I go for a walk when I am in this room?**

Yes. During the infectious stage of TB you need to wear a respiratory mask to cover you nose and mouth when you go for a walk while in hospital. The mask is put on before you leave the room. The Nursing staff will show you how to put on the mask. The mask should not be removed until you are back in your room with the doors closed.

### **Is there anything else that I should know?**

If you are coughing up phlegm please cough into a paper tissue. A bag will be provided near your bed for the tissues and discard into waste bin.

### **Can I have visitors in hospital?**

Yes. Your visitors may be asked to wear a respiratory mask when visiting you in your room.

**If you would like more information or have any questions on TB a member of Respiratory Team/the Infection Prevention and Control or Infectious Disease Team would be happy to speak to you. The ward staff will contact a member of the team on your behalf.**

8<sup>th</sup> January 2010

Adapted from "Tuberculosis leaflet" Peamount Hospital, Dublin

Infection Prevention and Control, Respiratory, Infectious  
Disease Teams  
St James's Hospital  
Dublin 8



## **TUBERCULOSIS (TB)**

**PATIENT/VISITOR  
INFORMATION LEAFLET**