

Tuberculosis - Fact Sheet for Health Care Workers & Students prior to Clinical Placement

Version 2 – August 2014

What is Tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis (TB) is an infectious disease and is the second highest killer among infectious diseases with an estimated 8.7 million cases of TB in 2011 (1.4 million deaths). TB is spread by bacteria in tiny airborne droplets that can be inhaled when someone with active TB coughs, sneezes, laughs or speaks. TB is not spread by shaking hands, sharing food, or by touching bed linen or toilet seats.

Australia has a low incidence of TB with approximately 1200-1400 notifications per year in the last decade (5-6/ 100,000 population), and Queensland (QLD) has had around 108-222 case notifications per year during this time. 75-85% of QLD's TB cases are overseas born, usually originating from countries with high TB incidence rates of >40/100,000 population.

TB Screening for Healthcare Workers / Students Prior to Clinical Placement

- Screening for TB is available to all healthcare workers, other allied health professionals and relevant students as transmission of TB in health care settings has the potential to cause serious illness in patients, staff and other users of the health care system.
- New staff and students are encouraged to check their baseline TB status.
- A Tuberculin Skin Test (Mantoux) is used to determine previous TB exposure.
<http://www.health.qld.gov.au/chrsp/tuberculosis/documents/factsheets/english/fsheet-4-english.pdf>
- It is highly recommended for anyone who is either from, or has travelled for > 3 months in the past 3 years to high TB risk countries. http://www.health.qld.gov.au/chrsp/tuberculosis/high_risk_index.asp
- BCG vaccine is not routinely given to Health Care Workers except for when the risk of multi-drug resistant TB transmission is high, or where ongoing exposure to infectious TB cannot be controlled.
- Treatment for latent TB infection (LTBI) may be offered if LTBI is found.

Risk Categories

High: Staff who will be working in respiratory units and specific TB treatment areas, intensive care units, emergency departments, bronchoscopy units and with TB and HIV positive patients; staff in TB culture laboratories; mortuary staff; someone who has previously been diagnosed with TB; close contacts of someone who has TB; those with chronic medical conditions such as diabetes and all immunocompromised health care workers.

Medium: Other medical and nursing staff, physiotherapists, radiographers, paramedical and ambulance staff and students involved in direct patient care; non-clinical staff in regular close contact with patients, other laboratory staff exposed to potential tuberculous material and community nurses working with at-risk groups.

Low: Those who are not routinely exposed to patients or their specimens e.g. kitchen, administration and clerical staff.

TB Screening Process

Students: Please complete the Student/Health Care Worker TB Assessment and Screening form. Please liaise with your University Administrator about their screening arrangements. Please bring the completed Student/Health Care Worker TB Assessment and Screening form & any vaccination record card you may have with you when you are tested.

Health Care Workers: Please complete the Student/Health Care Worker TB Assessment and Screening form and notify your clinician responsible for staff health who will arrange testing. Please bring the completed Student/Health Care Worker TB Assessment and Screening form & any vaccination record card you may have with you when you are tested.