

Tuberculosis in SA Aboriginal communities

Information for service providers

A number of tuberculosis (TB) cases have been detected in areas across South Australia.

Outbreaks of TB require prompt management including contact tracing and active case finding to treat, contain and eliminate the disease.

SA TB Services and SA Health are working closely with local health providers and Aboriginal communities to support and manage cases.

What is TB?

1. TB is caused by a bacterial infection. There are two types of TB: Active TB is when people have symptoms and can pass on the disease.
2. Latent TB is where people have no symptoms and are not infectious.

Around one in ten people who get latent TB will develop active TB.

How does TB spread?

TB is transmitted via aerosol generating behaviours like coughing, yelling or singing.

The TB bacteria is only contagious while airborne. This means the bacteria will not survive on surfaces and no additional cleaning protocols are required.

TB (bacteria) is very different to COVID (virus) and generally requires close and prolonged contact. Generally, only household contacts or people who have extended exposure (eight hours or more) to an active case are at risk. People with limited contact, those in outdoor areas or open workspaces are at low risk for transmission.

Message for service providers

It's important to note that TB transmission does not easily occur to healthy adults with strong immune systems who are working within health and safety guidelines. It generally requires at least eight hours of unprotected exposure to someone who is coughing in a poorly ventilated space.

As per standard advice, please wear a mask if working closely with someone who is coughing and practice hand hygiene.

If any service worker has been a close contact of someone found to have TB, SA TB Services' contact tracing team will be in touch for a discussion and, if necessary, a skin or blood test.

If you are unwell, do a COVID test and stay home until your acute symptoms have resolved. If you have ongoing or prolonged symptoms – a cough, especially with blood or mucus, fever, sweats or unexplained weight loss – call your doctor or local health clinic and discuss further testing options.

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How is TB treated?

Generally, people with TB don't have to isolate, although some people with active TB disease will need to stay away from others for the first two weeks of treatment or until symptoms subside. At this point, when an active TB case is on regular daily medication, they are no longer infectious.

It's important that people finish their full course of antibiotics otherwise the TB bacteria can become antibiotic resistant. This makes TB much harder to treat and manage.

The TB vaccine is only effective for children aged five years old and under. The vaccine doesn't stop children from catching TB, but it does reduce the severity of disease.

Help us eliminate TB in Aboriginal communities

SA TB Services is asking all service providers to help us build education and break down stigma around TB. We want people to be comfortable getting tested for TB and not be afraid of anyone who might be infected.

TB is still very common in other countries, and people are almost certain to recover if treated properly.

If you know someone undergoing treatment for active or latent TB, please help support them to take all their medications and regularly meet with their health workers. Treatment for active TB is intensive – many pills, daily, for six months or more – but it's critical that people fully complete their course of medication for better chances of recovery and prevention of drug resistance.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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