

Raising Awareness of TB in Social Care

This resource has been produced for managers and staff working in social care to raise awareness of Tuberculosis (TB). Being aware of the disease and the symptoms will ensure early diagnosis and treatment and help prevent the spread of TB.

What is Tuberculosis (TB)?

Tuberculosis otherwise known as TB is an infectious disease caused by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* bacteria which mainly affects the lungs however it can affect other parts of the body including the glands, brain and spine.

TB is a notifiable disease in the UK.

How common is TB in the UK?

Since 2016, the incidence of TB has fallen across the UK, with 76% of TB cases associated with infection outside of the UK in 2021. While England remains a low incidence country for TB, recent UKHSA data indicates a 7% increase in cases in the first half of 2023 compared to the same timeframe in 2022.

How is TB spread?

TB can be spread through close contact with people who have infectious TB. When someone with infectious pulmonary TB coughs or sneezes, they release small droplets containing the bacteria in the air. You can usually catch TB if you regularly breathe in these droplets over a long period of time.

What are the symptoms of TB?

- a cough that lasts more than 3 weeks -you may cough up mucus (phlegm) or mucus with blood in it.
- a high temperature
- night sweats
- lack of appetite
- unexplained weight loss
- Feeling very tired and having no energy

If you have any of these symptoms, speak to your GP.

Recognising the symptoms of TB will lead to early diagnosis and treatment.

[Tuberculosis \(TB\) - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)



Who is most at risk of TB?

Anyone can get TB but those most at risk are:

- Those who have had contact with a person with infectious TB.
- Those who have come to the UK from countries where TB is common.
- Those with a weakened immune system
- Those with social risk factors e.g homelessness, drug and alcohol misuse or a prison history.

What is the difference between active TB and Latent TB?

Some people can have TB bacteria in their body for many years without getting ill or having any symptoms. This is called latent TB and is a non-infectious form of TB. People with latent TB cannot pass TB on to others, but it can re-activate in the future particularly if your immune system becomes weakened. The bacteria can then spread within the lungs or other parts of the body and symptoms will develop within a few weeks or months. This is known as re-activation of TB infection.

What is multi drug resistant Tuberculosis (MDR TB)?

Multi drug resistant TB can occur when TB bacteria become resistant to the two most powerful antibiotics normally used to treat the disease. This means the TB is more difficult to treat. Resistance can occur when TB treatment is misused or mismanaged. An example is when an individual does not complete their full course of TB treatment. The most important thing a person can do to prevent MDR TB is to take their medication exactly as prescribed and complete the full course of treatment.

Can TB be treated?

TB is treatable with a course of antibiotics. [National Institute for Health and Care Excellence \(NICE\) guidelines on treatment of TB](#). It is vitally important to complete the course of treatment to reduce the risk of drug resistant TB and onward transmission of TB to other people. TB treatment is free for everyone. It is crucial that those with symptoms are tested for TB and appropriate treatment is started promptly. With treatment most people usually make a full recovery.

Is there a vaccine for TB?

There is a vaccine for tuberculosis (TB) called the BCG vaccine. It's recommended for some people who are at higher risk of catching TB or getting seriously ill from it. BCG works best to prevent the more serious forms of TB in children. However, the



BCG vaccine does not prevent TB in all cases, so you still need to be aware of symptoms of TB.

How to prevent the spread of TB in social care?

The most important and effective way to prevent the spread of TB is to diagnose individuals with the infection as soon as possible and make sure they have a full course of treatment. That is why it is so important to know about this infection and for managers and staff to be vigilant for symptoms of TB.

A staff member within the setting is suspected to have infectious TB.

Staff working in social care settings may develop symptoms of TB. If you suspect TB in a member of staff, advise to seek prompt medical advice. The GP can arrange a referral to the local TB service for relevant tests. The individual will be asked to provide a sputum sample which will be sent to the laboratory and tested for TB bacteria. If positive results are received, the GP should notify UKHSA HPT. They may also be offered an x ray. Staff with infectious TB are advised to stay away from work until they are no longer infectious which is usually two weeks from the start of their treatment and follow the advice given by the TB service.

Find local TB services here [Local services – Hertfordshire and West Essex NHS ICB](#).

A person living in a residential social care setting is suspected to have infectious TB.

People living in residential social care settings may develop symptoms of TB. Managers and staff need to be vigilant for the symptoms of TB and promptly refer to the GP. The GP will arrange for a referral to TB services for relevant tests. Early diagnosis and treatment is crucial and helps prevent the spread of TB. The individual should be supported to follow the advice provided by the TB service.

A person living in a residential social care setting has been diagnosed with infectious TB. How to prevent onward transmission within the setting?

Some individuals with infectious TB may be admitted to hospital for assessment and treatment.

- Support the individual to isolate in their room until they are no longer infectious which is usually two weeks from start of their treatment. The local TB service will be able to advise.

- Support the individual to take TB treatment and ensure the course is completed.
- Follow the advice given by the local TB service regarding appropriate personal protective equipment/ respiratory protective equipment to be worn by care workers during the infectious period.
- Encourage the individual to practice good respiratory hygiene.
- Ensure adequate ventilation by opening windows to allow fresh air in.
- Raise awareness of symptoms of TB among staff to ensure prompt referral of those displaying symptoms to the GP.

If the individual requires transfer to hospital, the ambulance service and the receiving hospital must be informed of the infectious status of the individual prior to arrival so a risk assessment can be undertaken.

A member of staff has been identified as a close contact of an individual diagnosed with infectious TB.

The risk of infection passing from an infected individual to staff and service users is generally very low. If you are identified as a close contact of the individual with infectious TB, as a precautionary measure you may be offered screening for TB through a specialist TB service. You will be assessed for symptoms and may be offered a skin test called the Mantoux test, a blood test or x ray. A close contact can continue to work if they are well. Continued vigilance for symptoms of TB is essential.

Useful Resources:

[Tuberculosis \(TB\): diagnosis, screening, management and data - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/topics/tuberculosis)

[Tuberculosis \(TB\): action plan for England, 2021 to 2026 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/tuberculosis)

[Overview | Tuberculosis | Guidance | NICE](https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/NG114)

[Tuberculosis \(TB\) - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/tuberculosis)

[NHS England » National infection prevention and control manual \(NIPCM\) for England](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-infection-prevention-and-control-manual-nipcm-for-england)

TB Alert – www.tbalert.org

The Truth About TB – www.thetruthabouttb.org

Animated film re LTBI - <https://youtu.be/tKwAHJ7JeV0>