

Occupational Health Group is a service offered to the business community of North Alabama by Huntsville Hospital and Decatur General Hospital Systems

TB or not TB...that is the question

by R. Michael Lowery M.D., M.P.H., Occupational Health Group

Tuberculosis (also known as TB) is an infectious disease that usually attacks the lungs, but it can attack almost any part of the body. Tuberculosis is spread from person to person through the air.

It is important to understand that there is a difference between being infected with TB and having TB disease. Someone who is infected with TB has the TB bacteria in their body. The body's defenses are protecting them from the germs and they are not sick. This is referred to as latent TB.

Someone with TB disease is sick and can spread the disease to other people. A person with TB disease needs to see a doctor as soon as possible. This is referred to as active TB.

It is not easy to become infected with tuberculosis. Usually a person has to be close to someone with TB disease for a long period of time. TB is usually spread between family members, close friends, and people who work or live together. TB is spread most easily in closed spaces over a long period of time. Repeated contact is usually required for infection. TB is spread by germs in the air, caused by coughing or sneezing. Books, furniture, tools or eating utensils does not spread infection.

There is little danger from the TB patient who is being treated, is taking his or her medication continuously, and is responding well. The drugs usually make the patient non-infectious within weeks.

Even if someone becomes infected with tuberculosis, that does not mean they will get TB disease. Most people who become infected do not develop TB disease because their body's defenses protect them. Experts believe that about 10 million Americans are infected with TB germs. Only about 10 percent of these people will develop TB disease in their lifetime. The other 90 percent will never get sick from the TB germs or be able to spread them to other people.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF TB?

A person with TB infection will have no symptoms. A person with TB disease may have any, all or none of the following symptoms:

- A cough that will not go away
- Feeling tired all the time
- Weight loss
- Loss of appetite
- Fever
- Coughing up blood
- Night sweats

WHO GETS IT?

Anyone can get TB. However, some groups are at higher risk to get active TB disease. The groups that are at high risk include:

- People with HIV infection (the AIDS virus)
- People in close contact with those known to be infectious with TB
- People with medical conditions that make the body less able to protect itself from disease (for example: diabetes, silicosis, or people undergoing treatment with drugs that can suppress the immune system)
- Foreign-born people from countries with high TB rates
- Some racial or ethnic minorities
- People who work in or are residents of long-term care facilities (nursing homes, some hospitals)
- Health care workers
- People who are malnourished
- Alcoholics, IV drug users and people who are homeless

WHAT IS THE TB SKIN TEST?

The TB skin test is a way to find out if a person has TB infection. Although there is more than one TB skin test, the preferred method of testing is to use the Mantoux test.

For this test, a small amount of testing material is placed just below the top layers of skin, usually on the arm. Two to three days later a health care worker checks the arm to see if a bump has developed and measures the size of the bump. The significance of the size of the bump is determined in conjunction with risk factors for TB.

Once the doctor knows that a person has TB infection he or she will want to determine if the person has TB disease. This is done by using several other tests including a chest X-ray and a test of a person's mucus (the material that is sometimes coughed up from the lungs).

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT FOR TB?

Treatment for TB depends on whether a person has active TB disease or only TB infection. A person who has become infected with TB, but does not have active TB disease, may be given preventive therapy. Preventive therapy aims to kill germs that are not doing any damage right now, but could so do.

If a doctor decides a person should receive preventive therapy, the usual prescription is a daily dose of isoniazid (INH); The person takes INH for nine months (up to a year for some patients).

If the person has active TB disease, treatment is needed. The patient usually gets a combination of several drugs (most frequently INH plus two to three others including rifampin, pyrazinamide and ethambutol). The patient will probably begin to feel better only a few weeks after starting to take the drugs. After a few weeks a person can probably even return to normal activities and not have to worry about infecting others.

TB or not TB...that is the question (con't)

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT FOR TB? (con't)

It is very important, however, that the patient continue to take the medicine correctly for the full length of treatment. If the medicine is taken incorrectly or stopped the patient may become sick again and will be able to infect others with TB. If the medicine is taken incorrectly and the patient becomes sick with TB a second time, the TB may be harder to treat because it has become drug resistant. This means that the TB germs in the body are unaffected by some drugs used to treat TB. Multi-drug resistant TB is very dangerous, so patients should be sure that they take all of their medicine correctly.

TB: WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

Find out if you're infected. A negative test usually means that you are not infected and no treatment is needed. However, if you have TB symptoms your doctor must continue to look for the cause. Sometimes, when a person has only recently been infected, or when his or her immune system isn't working properly, the test may be falsely negative.

A positive test usually means that you have been infected with the TB germ. It does not necessarily mean that you have TB disease. If the doctor recommends treatment to prevent sickness, follow the recommendations. If medicine is prescribed, be sure to take it as directed.

Employee Spotlight: Jan Burton, RN, OHN



Jan is one of the registered nurses and educators for OHG's Huntsville clinic. She joined OHG in 2004, coming from an industrial healthcare setting with 25 years experience. Over the years, Jan's experience has encompassed a broad range of services from coordinating wellness programs to worker's compensation case management. She is a Board Certified Occupational Health Nurse, a Certified Occupational Hearing Conservationist and a Certified Instructor of First Aid, CPR, Breath Alcohol and Drug Screening, Spirometry and Bloodborne Pathogens. Jan received her nursing degree from Calhoun Community College. She is a member of the American Board of Occupational Health Nurses.

OHG Welcomes Marketing Personnel



OHG welcomes Andrea Calloway as its new Marketing and Business Development Representative for the Huntsville and Madison area. Andrea has been with OHG since 2001, serving in a variety of positions within the Huntsville and Madison Clinics. With her diverse administrative and clinical background and her knowledge of Occupational Medicine, she will be a tremendous asset to our clients. She will work with our employers to build relationships, manage customer service issues, and provide guidance and advice on existing or possible services. She is currently attending college for her degree in Business Management with a minor in Marketing.

Obesity Linked to Higher Worker's Compensation Claims

People who are overweight and obese tend to use more health care services than other individuals and are at a greater risk of morbidity and mortality. Now comes a report documenting that obesity is associated with increased workers' compensation claims and costs. A group of investigators conducted a retrospective study of 11,728 health care and university employees during 1997-2004. The researchers tracked workers' compensation claims, associated costs, lost workdays, and individual characteristics such as body mass index (BMI), age, sex, and smoking status.

Analysis of data showed that people with a BMI ≥ 40 had 11.65 claims per 100 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions, compared with 5.8 claims among those in a normal BMI range. The obese participants also lost more time from work; 183 workdays were lost per FTE among those with a BMI

of; ≥ 40 , compared with 14.19 among those in the normal BMI range. Medical claims also were substantially higher, adding up to \$59,178 per FTE among obese employees, compared with \$7,503 per FTE among people with normal weight.

The results suggest that – considering the expenses associated with workers' comp – employers may want to invest in programs that encourage employees to lose weight and adopt healthier lifestyles.

Ostbye T, Dement JM, Krause KM: Obesity and workers' compensation. Arch Intern Med 167:766-773, 2007.

1 in 12 Full-Time Workers Admits Using Drugs

One in 12 full-time workers in the United States acknowledges having used illegal drugs in the past month, the government reports.

Most of those who report using illicit drugs are employed full-time, with the highest rates among restaurant workers, 17.4 percent, and construction workers, 15.1 percent, according to a federal study being released Monday. About 4 percent of teachers and social service workers reported using illegal drugs in the past month, which was among the lowest rates.

[To Read the Full Story, Click Here...](#)

[To View Previous OHG Newsroom Articles, Click Here...](#)

OHG Directory

Administration.....	(256) 922-6675
Marketing and Business Development.....	(256) 922-6677
Billing Department.....	(256) 922-6673
OHG - Huntsville.....	(256) 265-7000
OHG - Madison.....	(256) 774-7300
OHG - Decatur.....	(256) 353-4325
Wellness Services.....	(256) 922-6699

www.OHGonline.org



DECATUR

1615 Kathy Lane
Decatur, AL 35603
Phone: (256) 353-4325
Fax: (256) 922-2531

HUNTSVILLE

1963 Memorial Parkway
Suite 24
Huntsville, AL 35801
Phone: (256) 265-7000
Fax: (256) 265-7007

MADISON

9238 Madison Boulevard
Building 1, Ste. 200
Madison, AL 35758
Phone: (256) 774-7300
Fax: (256) 922-2532

WELLNESS

6767 Old Madison Pike
Building 4, Ste. 400
Huntsville, AL 35806
Phone: (256) 922-6699
Fax: (256) 922-6660