



Recommendations for Tuberculosis (TB) Screening in Long-Term Care and Retirement Homes

TB Facts:

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* bacteria. The bacteria usually affect the lungs; however TB bacteria can affect any part of the body such as the spine, brain and kidneys. Tuberculosis can be fatal if not treated properly.

TB of the lungs or throat can be spread through the air from one person to another. The bacteria are released into the air when a person with TB disease of the lungs or throat coughs or sneezes. People nearby may breathe in these bacteria and become infected.

However, not everyone infected with TB becomes sick. As a result, two TB-related conditions exist: Latent TB Infection (LTBI) and active TB disease.

Persons with (LTBI) do not feel sick, and does not have any symptoms. They are infected with *M. tuberculosis*, but do not have TB disease. The only sign of TB infection is a positive reaction to the Tuberculin Skin Test (TST) or TB blood test. Persons with LTBI are not infectious and cannot spread the disease to others.

Overall, without treatment, about 5% to 10% of persons with LTBI will develop TB disease at some time in their lives. About half of those people who develop TB will do so within the first two years of being infected.

The risk of developing TB is much higher in persons whose immune systems are weak, (for example, those with HIV), compared to persons with normal immune systems.

TB Screening:

In Ontario, the *Long Term Care Homes Act, (2007)* and *Retirement Homes Act, 2010)* require screening of residents for tuberculosis prior to admission.

“Each resident admitted to the home must be screened for tuberculosis within 14 days of admission unless the resident has already been screened at some time in the 90 days prior to admission and the documented results of this screening are available to the licensee.” Ontario Long-Term Care Homes Act 2007.

While screening has not been defined in the Act, the TST has traditionally been used to screen for TB in Long Term Care and Retirement Homes. Tuberculin skin tests however, only screen for latent infection, not for active TB disease. It is important that facilities rule out active TB disease in all residents on admission to prevent transmission to others in the home.

As well, skin tests become much more unreliable as people reach old age and older residents may not be good candidates for treatment of TB infection because they often do not tolerate the medication.

Given these limitations, Canadian guidelines* regarding screening for TB in Long Term Care Homes have changed.

*For more information refer to the *Canadian tuberculosis standards* (7th ed.).



RENFREW COUNTY AND DISTRICT HEALTH UNIT

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NEW Recommendations for Residents

All new residents must undergo a history and physical examination by a physician or nurse practitioner within 90 days prior to admission or within 14 days after admission. It is recommended that this assessment include:

1. A medical assessment and symptom review to rule out active TB disease.
2. A chest x-ray (posterior-anterior and lateral).
3. If signs and symptoms and/or chest x-ray indicate potential active TB disease, the resident should not be admitted to the facility until further testing is completed.
4. Residents who are **less than 65 years of age** should have a baseline two-step TB skin test. A one-step TST may be given to residents who meet specific criteria (see table below).
5. A TST is **not** recommended for any resident who is 65 years or older.
6. A TST is not recommended for residents who had a previous positive (+) TST or a history of active or latent TB.

A one-step TST may be given to residents (under the age of 65) who meet the following criteria:

1. Documented results of a prior two-step TST with a result of <10mm at any time in the past,
2. Documented, single negative TST result within the past 12 months, or
3. Two or more documented negative TST results at any time, the most recent one being less than 12 months ago.

Reference: *Canadian tuberculosis standards (7th ed.)*.

Reporting Requirements for TB:

Under the Health Promotion and Protection Act, R.S.O. 1990, c.H.7, diagnoses of TB infection and cases of suspect and confirmed active TB disease are reportable to Public Health. For more information on how to report or to ask for advice related to TB infection or TB disease, please contact Renfrew County and District Health Unit at 613-735-8651 or 1-800-267-1097.