

Managing tuberculosis (TB)

Information for clinicians and health workers

Tuberculosis (TB) is caused by the bacteria *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* and most often affects the lungs (pulmonary TB) but can also affect other parts of the body (disseminated TB).

TB is spread through droplet nuclei in the air when people with active pulmonary TB cough, sneeze, speak or sing. A person needs to inhale only a few bacteria to become infected.

An estimated 1.6 million people died from TB in 2021, making it the world's top infectious killer. Although no longer common in Australia, it still disproportionately affects Aboriginal populations.

TB is curable however treatment is complex and lengthy.

Symptoms

It is critical that health workers are thinking of TB when someone presents with any of the following symptoms, especially if they are Aboriginal or have travelled from a high-burden TB country:

- > prolonged cough of at least three weeks, sometimes with blood
- > unexplained weight loss
- > fever or night sweats.

Latent TB

People with latent TB infection don't feel sick and aren't contagious but approximately 10% will go on to get active TB disease and symptoms. Babies, children, older people and people with compromised immune systems are at higher risk.

Managing the current outbreak

There are currently clusters of TB cases affecting Aboriginal and at-risk communities, including communities in the APY Lands. The response is being managed by SA TB Services however support is needed from local health services.

There are several key messages for health workers:

- > Please think of TB when you are examining patients with any relevant symptoms. For further information regarding clinical investigation please refer to this [health alert](#).
- > Health workers need to help support and encourage patients' adherence to treatment plans – there are a lot of medications to take daily for months, with daily observed treatment (DOT).

For more information:

Royal Adelaide Hospital, SA TB Services
Telephone: (08) 7074 1089 (business hours)

www.sahealth.sa.gov.au

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