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Basic Tuberculosis Facts

What to Do If You Have Been Exposed To TB

You may have been exposed to tuberculosis bacteria if you spent time near someone with TB disease. The TB bacteria are put into the air when a person with active TB disease of the lungs or throat coughs, sneezes, speaks, or sings. You cannot get TB from:

- Clothes
- Drinking glass
- Eating utensils
- Handshake
- Toilet
- Other surfaces

If you think you have been exposed to someone with TB disease, you should contact your doctor or the Josephine County Public Health Department about getting a TB skin test.

It is important to know that a person who is exposed to TB bacteria is not able to spread the bacteria to other people right away. Only persons with active TB disease can spread TB bacteria to others. Before you would be able to spread TB to others, you would have to breathe in TB bacteria and become infected. Then the active bacteria would have to multiply in your body and cause active TB disease. At this point, you could possibly spread TB bacteria to others. People with TB disease are most likely to spread the bacteria to people they spend time with every day, such as family members, friends, coworkers, or schoolmates.

Some people develop TB disease soon (within weeks) after becoming infected, before their immune system can fight the TB bacteria. Other people may get sick years later, when their immune system becomes weak for another reason. Many people with TB infection never develop TB disease.