



June 26, 2018

Tuberculosis and the Education system

Tuberculosis is a bacterial infection that remains a significant public health problem within Nunavut. Tuberculosis is contagious, but requires a fair amount of close contact for transmission to occur, much more than most other contagious diseases. Additionally, tuberculosis is also one of the few human infections that enters a latent stage. In latent tuberculosis (commonly called sleeping TB in Nunavut) the affected individual has no symptoms and is not infectious. Transmission only occurs when individuals with active TB are in contact with others. Although the treatment for active TB is quite long (at least 6 months) individuals with active TB are usually only infectious for the first 2 weeks, during which they should be isolated.

Health response to tuberculosis

When an individual is newly diagnosed with active TB Dept. of Health staff undertake the following:

- isolation (at home or in hospital)
- initiation of treatment
- contact tracing

Contact tracing is a standard process used to both identify those who may have been exposed and to stratify their risk. Close contacts are at the highest risk of developing some form of tuberculosis. The vast majority of this degree of contact occurs at home, between family members. Because of this, individuals named as having had household contact with active TB are always the highest priority for screening. Workplace (including schools) contacts with active are usually second or third priority. Outside of health care works there are few if any jobs linked with increased relative risk of developing tuberculosis.

The risk of contracting TB is affected by many factors that vary from case to case. Some individuals with TB are more likely to pass it on than others. The one factor that can be measured is the length of contact time with someone who has active TB. Depending on how infectious an individual is the time needed for transmission to occur can be as long as 80 hours. Outside of health care and other occupations requiring close contact, the nature of the work being performed does not affect transmission. Thus a school employee who is exposed at school is treated the same as an employee in any other workplace. There should be no bias toward one Nunavummiut cohort in relation to general public health issues. TB is not unique or confined to one work place.

