

## INFORMATION ABOUT TB

### HOW IS THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH RESPONDING TO ACTIVE TB DISEASE AMONG THE HOMELESS?

The Department is working with homeless shelters to:

- Identify persons with active TB disease for isolation and treatment
- Identify persons with latent TB infection and treat them
- Educate shelter staff on TB prevention
- Institutionalize TB screening in shelters to prevent active TB disease
- Develop a comprehensive data system to monitor and track all clients

#### What is TB?

Tuberculosis (TB) is caused by a bacterium called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. The bacteria usually attack the lungs, but TB bacteria can attack any part of the body such as the kidney, spine, and brain. If not treated properly, TB disease can be fatal.

There are two forms of TB: **latent TB infection** and **active TB disease**. People with latent TB infection don't feel sick, don't have symptoms, and can't spread TB bacteria to others. People with latent TB infection can go on to develop TB disease if they don't take preventive therapy. People with active TB disease feel sick, have signs and symptoms, and may spread TB bacteria to others. People who think they were exposed to someone with active TB disease should contact their health care provider or the local health department to see if testing is needed: <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/tb/TBTesting.htm>.

#### What are TB symptoms?

Signs and symptoms of TB disease include:

- A bad cough that lasts two to three weeks or longer
- Unexplained weight loss
- Fever
- Chills
- Sweating at night
- Pain in the chest
- Weakness/fatigue
- Decreased appetite
- Coughing up blood-tinged sputum

## **INFORMATION ABOUT TB**

### **How is TB spread?**

TB is spread when a person with active TB disease of the lungs or throat expels TB germs into the air (e.g., by coughing) and another person inhales the TB germs. You can't catch TB from clothes, dishes, food, body contact, or passing someone on the street.

Transmission of TB is usually associated with prolonged or frequent close contact with a person with active TB disease.

### **Is there increased risk of getting TB for people who work or live in the downtown Los Angeles area or Skid Row?**

Transmission of TB is usually associated with prolonged or frequent close contact with a person with active TB disease. People who work in certain locations (e.g., healthcare professionals, EMTs, police and shelter workers) should be screened at least annually for TB. Individuals with a positive screening test should be evaluated by a physician for active TB disease and treated appropriately. Persons screened who do not have active TB disease but have latent TB infection should be offered treatment for latent TB infection.

### **People Working or Volunteering with the Homeless Population**

Persons working with homeless populations should remain alert to the signs and symptoms of active TB disease (e.g., prolonged cough, weight loss, fever, night sweats,) and refer those individuals promptly for further medical evaluation.

If staff members identify a symptomatic client, they should immediately provide the client with tissues and instruct the client to cover his/her nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing. The client should also be given a surgical mask and instructed to place it over both the mouth and nose area.

**Masks are not generally required for protection against TB for persons working or living in the Downtown Los Angeles or Skid Row area. It is more effective to mask the person exhibiting symptoms of TB (e.g., coughing) in order to contain the spread of TB germs.**