Tuberculosis (TB) has been on the rise recently in the Twin Cities Metro. Since we provide testing and diagnostic services for many of our customers, we thought some basic information on the disease and the role of Occupational Medicine would be helpful.

What is TB infection?

TB is a contagious, infectious and fortunately, a treatable disease caused by the bacterium *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. When an infected individual coughs or sneezes, they may exhale air that contains TB bacteria. If another person inhales these bacteria, they may become infected. However, not everyone infected with TB bacteria becomes sick. As a result, two TB related conditions exist: latent TB infection and TB disease.

What is latent TB infection? A person with latent TB infection:

- Does not feel sick
- Has TB bacteria in her/his body that are alive but inactive
- Cannot spread TB bacteria to others
- Needs treatment for latent TB infection to prevent TB disease
- Usually has a skin test or blood test result indicating TB infection
- Has a normal chest x-ray and negative sputum test

What is TB disease? The general symptoms include:

- Unexplained weight loss, loss of appetite
- Fatigue, fever, chills, night sweats
- Cough for 3 weeks or longer, often with blood
- Chest pain

Who develops TB disease?

Overall, without treatment, about 5-10% of infected persons will develop TB disease at some point in their lives. About half of those people who develop TB disease will do so within the first two years of infection. For persons whose immune systems are weak, especially those with HIV, the risk of developing TB disease is considerably higher than for persons with normal immune systems.

What is the role of HealthPartners Occupational Medicine?

First of all, we provide mantoux skin testing as well as the newer TB Gold blood testing to determine the presence of TB bacteria in employees. Our physicians are normally asked to review any positive results. When a TB test is positive the physician may order a confirmatory TB blood test if one was not previously done. If there is a strong suspicion
or confirmation of TB infection, the physician will order a chest x-ray to look for TB disease in the lungs. When the diagnosis of latent TB infection or active TB disease is determined, the physician will treat with the appropriate medications. Our employer customer will be notified of the final result.

**How do we prevent the spread of TB disease?**

- The use of N95 masks is appropriate when in a high risk environment
- Surveillance with yearly skin test or blood test

If you have any questions on your TB testing program, please contact us.

### Preplacement & DOT Exams

We frequently speak with customers about the similarities/differences between preplacement and DOT (Department of Transportation) exams. A common misunderstanding we encounter is that these exams are interchangeable. Here’s a summary:

The DOT requires operators of certain vehicles to carry a DOT medical card. The signed card proves the operator has submitted to a physical exam by a medical professional. The primary purpose of the exam is to determine if the driver poses a risk to themselves or other drivers for vehicle accidents caused by seizures, strokes, poor vision/hearing or loss of vehicle control due to problems with limbs. The maximum time a card may be issued for is two years and specific rules govern the shortened timeframe of cards for drivers with medical conditions.

The DOT isn’t focused on the physical, functional capability of drivers. This is the focus of the preplacement exam.

Preplacement exams are implemented by company policy. The company is asking HealthPartners Occupational Medicine to review the applicant’s health history, perform a thorough musculoskeletal exam (focused on backs, knees, shoulders) and issue a written opinion regarding the applicant’s ability to perform physically demanding work (e.g., lifting, carrying, etc).

A simple statement of contrast is, the DOT exam focuses on the driver’s ability to safely operate a motor vehicle (often a truck); the preplacement exam focuses on the drivers ability to safely load/unload the truck, bus or other vehicle, moving boxes, baggage, etc.

The exams are complementary and have little overlap. Let us know if you have questions about either exam type.

### Occupational Medicine & Urgent Care Clinic Locations

**HealthPartners Riverside Clinic**  
Occupational Medicine  
2220 Riverside Avenue South  
Minneapolis, MN  55454  
952-883-6999 Opt. 1  
612-341-5131 (fax)

**HealthPartners St. Paul Clinic**  
Occupational Medicine  
205 S. Wabasha St.  
St. Paul, MN 55107  
952-883-6999 Opt. 2  
651-293-8183 (fax)

**HealthPartners West Clinic**  
Occupational Medicine  
5100 Gamble Drive, Suite 100  
St. Louis Park, MN 55416  
952-883-6999 Opt. 3  
952-541-2626 (fax)

**HealthPartners Arden Hills Clinic**  
3930 Northwoods Dr  
Arden Hills, MN 55112  
952-883-6999 Opt. 4