Tuberculosis in the Twin Cities

Although the incidence of Tuberculosis (TB) has tapered off recently in the Twin Cities, we thought some basic information on the disease and the role of Occupational Medicine would be helpful. We provide testing and diagnostic services for many of our customers, particularly those in healthcare, public safety and medical device manufacturing.

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.

Continued on page 2
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

Testing Methods We offer the traditional Mantoux skin test which requires two trips into the clinic for completion. Many of our customers have switched to the TB Gold blood test; it only requires one trip, is considered more accurate and not prone to the problems many with histories of past positive exams have.

Custom-Fit Earplugs & Safety Glasses Now Available

For hearing protection, our West Clinic Audiology Department will:

- Perform impressions of both ears
- Create custom ear protection for both ears with cords in the employee’s choice of color
- Perform a verification of proper fit

HealthPartners guarantees the fit and will remake the protection at no additional cost if the fit is inadequate. Package price is $180. Prescription safety glasses pricing varies depending upon frame style, type of lens and other options. Contact Kirk Hyatt if you have any questions.