



# Preventing & Addressing Tuberculosis among People Experiencing Homelessness

## Why is Tuberculosis a Concern?

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by bacteria that are spread from person to person through the air. TB germs are passed through the air when someone who is sick with TB disease of the lungs or throat coughs, speaks, laughs, sings, or sneezes. Anyone near the sick person with TB disease can breathe TB bacteria into their lungs and become infected. 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.

TB is a serious health concern for people experiencing homelessness and those working with homeless populations. TB rates are 10 times higher for people experiencing homelessness. Of the patients involved in TB outbreaks investigated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 2010 – 2012, over half did not have a place to call home.

Adding to the problem, people experiencing homelessness are more likely to have other conditions that increase the risk of TB, including malnutrition, substance use, HIV-infection, and congregation in crowded shelters. This combination of conditions can increase the likelihood of spreading TB.

## What Can Service Providers Do to Decrease Risk & Exposure to TB?

- **Learn about TB** and assess the risk of TB transmission in your facility.
- **Be alert** to residents exhibiting the signs and symptoms of TB disease.
- **Adopt** a TB infection control policy.

Partnership with your State TB control program is essential. To find the TB program in your state, visit CDC's [list of State TB control offices](#).

## Helpful Resources

- For more information on TB, such as testing and diagnosis, treatment, and infection control, visit CDC's [TB website](#).
- The Curry International TB Center's Shelters and TB: [What Staff Need to Know, Second Edition](#) provides helpful guidance on TB control in shelters.
- For additional educational materials on TB, visit the [Find TB Resources website](#)

*“With all the pressing demands of running a homeless shelter, I didn’t take TB that seriously, even when the health department found the first case. Boy, was I wrong. Hundreds of thousands of dollars and thousands of staff hours later (that could have been spent getting people out of homelessness!) I now realize just how devastating TB can be to a shelter once it gets a foothold.”*

**-Ryan Dowd, Hesed House**

## Symptoms of TB include:

- A bad cough that lasts three weeks or longer
- Pain in the chest
- Coughing up blood or sputum (phlegm)
- Weakness or fatigue
- Weight loss
- No appetite
- Chills
- Fever
- Sweating at night

“Preventing and Addressing Tuberculosis among People Experiencing Homelessness” is a joint publication of [USICH](#), the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), and the [National Health Care for the Homeless Council](#).