FAQs about Tuberculosis

Due to the recent case of extensively drug resistant tuberculosis (XDR TB) in the news, we would like to take this opportunity to address some of the more frequently asked questions about TB.

What is TB?

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by bacteria called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. The bacteria usually attack the lungs, but can attack any part of the body such as the kidney, spine, and brain. If not treated properly, TB disease can be fatal. TB disease was once the leading cause of death in the United States. Starting in the 1940s, scientists discovered the first of several medicines now used to treat TB. As a result, TB slowly began to decrease in the United States. But TB is still a problem; more than 14,000 cases were reported in 2003 in the United States.

How is TB spread?

TB is spread through the air from one person to another. The bacteria are put into the air when a person with active TB disease of the lungs or throat coughs or sneezes. People nearby may breathe in these bacteria and become infected.

What is the difference between latent TB infection and active TB disease?

Not everyone infected with TB bacteria becomes sick. People who are not sick have what is called latent TB infection. People who have latent TB infection do not feel sick, do not have any symptoms, and cannot spread TB to others. But, some people with latent TB infection go on to get active TB disease in the future.

A Person with Latent TB Infection	A Person with Active TB Disease

• Has no symptoms
• Does not feel sick
• Cannot spread TB to others
• May develop active TB in the future
	• Has symptoms that may include:
	  • a bad cough that lasts 3 weeks or longer
	  • pain in the chest
	  • coughing up blood or sputum
	  • weakness or fatigue
	  • weight loss
	  • no appetite
	  • chills
	  • fever
	  • sweating at night
	• May spread TB to others

Can TB be treated?

People with active TB disease can be treated and cured if they seek medical help. Even better, people with latent TB infection can take medicine so that they will not develop active TB disease in the future.

What is multi-drug resistant tuberculosis (MDR TB)?

Multi-drug resistant TB (MDR TB) is TB that is resistant to at least two of the best anti-TB drugs, isoniazid and rifampin. These drugs are considered first-line drugs and are used to treat all persons with TB disease.

What is extensively drug resistant tuberculosis (XDR TB)?

Extensively drug resistant TB (XDR TB) is a rare type of MDR TB. XDR TB is defined as TB which is resistant to the first-line drugs, isoniazid and rifampin, plus resistant to some second-line drugs. Because XDR TB is resistant to first-line and second-line drugs, patients are left with treatment options that are much less effective.

What is USD doing about TB?

All new students are required to get TB testing within the year before coming to USD. A positive skin test or blood test means that a student has been exposed to TB and he/she is required to get a chest x-ray to determine if there is active TB disease. If the chest x-ray is negative, it is assumed that the patient has latent TB, is not an infectious risk, and can be treated to prevent active disease in the future. If the chest x-ray is positive, treatment would be initiated, and the student would not be allowed to attend USD until he/she was determined not to be infectious. To date, there have been no cases of active TB at USD.

In addition to new students, you should get tested if:

- You have spent time with a person known to have active TB disease or suspected to have active TB disease; or
- You have HIV infection or another condition that puts you at high risk for active TB disease; or
- You think you might have active TB disease; or
- You are from or have traveled to a country where active TB disease is very common (most countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and Russia); or
- You live somewhere in the United States that active TB disease is more common such as a homeless shelter, migrant farm camp, prison or jail, and some nursing homes); or
- You inject illegal drugs.

The PPD skin test is available at the Student Health Center for $10, and the Quantiferon blood test is available for $60. Feel free to call the health center at 619-260-4595 or stop by to see which test is best for you.