

# Tuberculosis Conversation Guide

**Designated staff at each jail should initiate conversations about continuity of care for tuberculosis (TB) with inmates scheduled for release from a correctional facility. Continuity of care is integral to successfully completing treatment for TB. This document serves as a conversation guide for jail staff to discuss TB with an inmate.**

## What is Tuberculosis?

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TB germs go into the air when a person with TB disease of the lungs or throat coughs, sneezes, speaks, or sings. Depending on the environment, these germs can stay in the air for several hours. People who breathe in air containing these TB germs can become infected. This is called TB infection (also known as latent tuberculosis infection), with which there are no symptoms, and it is not contagious. If untreated, TB infection can become TB disease. TB disease is infectious and generally has symptoms; however, not all cases of TB disease are symptomatic.

### *What are the symptoms of TB disease?*

The general symptoms of TB disease may include weakness or fatigue, weight loss, fever, chills, and night sweats. The symptoms of TB disease of the lungs may also include a cough that lasts three weeks or longer, chest pain, and coughing up blood or phlegm.

## TB Treatment

### *Why should I get treatment for TB?*

Treating TB with prescribed medications can effectively kill TB germs and cure you of TB. If you are diagnosed with TB infection, treatment can prevent your infection from progressing to TB disease. If you do not take treatment, TB infection can develop into TB disease, and active TB disease can lead to serious sickness or death. The benefits of receiving treatment for TB are that it will cure you of the disease and eliminate the germs from your body. When taken as directed, treatment for active TB disease will stop the spread of the disease to others around you. Treating TB and following through with treatment completion can also prevent your TB germs from becoming drug (medication) resistant.

### *Why does treatment for TB take so long?*

TB germs are very strong and can take a long time to die. To ensure your body is free from TB germs, you must take several medications for extended periods of time to kill them all. Treatment for TB is most effective when taken as your healthcare provider prescribes. If you stop treatment before it is finished, it can lengthen the time treatment will take when you start it up again.

### ***Why do I have to take so many medications to treat TB?***

Since TB is a powerful germ, using several medications ensures that the germs will be killed and not return. Taking the different medications your health care provider prescribes will also prevent the germs from developing drug resistance.

### ***What is directly observed therapy (DOT)? Why do I need to do DOT for my TB medication?***

Directly observed therapy, or DOT, is a medication management method in which a healthcare worker observes you swallowing every dose of your prescribed medications. This is done to ensure that you take the medications, to monitor side effects, and to confirm that you complete the treatment. DOT is used for TB medications to improve adherence with treatment, prevent drug-resistant germs from developing, prevent relapse of TB disease, and improve your chances of killing all the TB germs in your body. It is very important for you to show up to your DOT appointments and take your TB medications as prescribed.

### ***Do I need to continue my treatment post-incarceration?***

It is important to continue your TB treatment post-incarceration to ensure that all the TB germs are killed and that you are no longer infectious to those around you (if you have active TB disease in your lungs).

### ***How do I continue my treatment post-incarceration?***

Upon your release from the correctional facility, the facility staff will notify the local health department or Public Health Region in the area of your release and will transfer your medical records. From there, the health department will work with you to set up and continue your medication routine and to continue the care that you were provided for TB while incarcerated. When you are released, you will also receive a contact card for the health department to continue treatment. Treatment for TB at a [Texas Department of State Health Services-funded TB program](#) is free.

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## **Other**

### ***How do I contact my local health department or Public Health Region?***

Your correctional facility will provide you with a pre-filled contact card for your [local health department or Public Health Region](#). This card will provide all the necessary contact information and details to connect with the health department. Once you are in contact with the health department, they will work with you to coordinate your TB medications and treatment post-incarceration.

### ***How can I protect individuals around me and reduce the spread of TB if I am contagious?***

If you have contagious TB disease, starting and finishing treatment with your prescribed TB medications is the best way to reduce the spread of TB germs in your home and within your community. Also, please attend all TB medical appointments and check-ins with your healthcare provider. Please try to stay home and isolate yourself to limit your contact with other people until the health department clears you.