

Human Tuberculosis

Health Hazard Information Sheet

This document provides information on human tuberculosis (TB) and describes the process to follow when personnel are concerned about potential infection. It also explains the steps the Agency is taking to ensure that the Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) inspection personnel are notified when a private establishment employee has active TB disease.

Background

FSIS personnel in slaughter and processing establishments work in close proximity to establishment employees and have expressed concern regarding acquiring TB from the establishment personnel.

TB is a disease caused by a bacterial infection. The bacteria can attack any part of the body. The symptoms of disease include low-grade fever, night sweats, fatigue, weight loss, and persistent cough.

A person infected with TB is considered to have either latent TB or TB disease. TB may last for a lifetime as an infection and never develop into a disease. Persons with TB disease are sick from bacteria that are active in the body, and they usually have one or more symptoms of TB. These people are often capable of infecting others. On the other hand, people with latent TB infection (without disease) have the bacteria that cause TB in their body, but they are not sick because the bacteria are inactive. They cannot spread TB to others while the infection is in the latent stage.

TB is spread from person to person through the air when a person with TB disease coughs or sneezes. Prolonged exposure to a person with TB disease usually is necessary for infection to occur.

Treatment for latent TB infection will considerably reduce the risk of developing active TB disease. A person with latent TB infection may be given prescribed medication. A more intense and lengthy treatment is needed if the person has TB disease.

Testing and Response

Because TB is a communicable disease, it falls under the jurisdiction of State or local health departments. When establishment personnel test positive for TB disease, the State or local public health department often informs establishment management. A State or local public health official makes an on-site visit or telephone contact to assess the risk of exposure based on proximity of individuals to the affected person and other established criteria and to identify plant or inspection personnel to be tested.

A number of health departments are unaware that there are Federal employees present in slaughter and processing establishments, and on occasion, inspection personnel are unaware that testing is occurring.

If inspectors do not have an opportunity to be tested by the health department while in the establishment after a worker has been diagnosed with TB disease, they can arrange to get a TB skin test at their local public health office. The test is quick and simple with results in only a few days. The test is usually at no charge.

Industry Notification of TB Positive Plant Employee

The Inspector in Charge at each facility should request at their weekly HACCP meetings that the establishment notify FSIS management when they become aware that an employee has TB disease. Plant managers sometimes have been hesitant to notify FSIS of TB positive employees for fear that the Agency would withdraw inspection personnel. Although 29 CFR 1960 provides the Agency with the authority to withdraw inspection if hazards exist that are causing, or are likely to cause, death or serious harm to FSIS personnel, under most circumstances, an establishment employee testing positive for TB would not meet this criterion.

A person with TB disease cannot continue to work in the plant without permission from the public health department or their personal physician. With treatment, the employee will no longer be infectious and may be back to work in a short time. Any person with latent TB can work. Establishment management is responsible for ensuring that their employees do not have a contagious disease in a transmissible stage.

Filing a Claim for TB

As a Federal Employee it is your right to file a workers' compensation claim at any time under the Federal Employee's Compensation Act (FECA).

How should training for this Health Hazard Information Sheet be recorded?

Per requirements found in FSIS Directive 4791.1 Section IX, all occupational health and safety training is to be recorded using either AgLearn or FSIS form 3530-12. Training records are to include the topics covered, date, and employee name. The Agency is to retain all training records for a minimum of five years."

Resources

Further information about workers' compensation and claim forms are available on the website <https://www.ecomp.dol.gov/>.

Refer general TB questions to Curtis Wallis, Team Lead for the Environmental, Safety and Health Group. He can be reached at Curtis.Wallis@fsis.usda.gov.

Refer questions regarding filing claims for workers' compensation under FECA for TB disease to the Workers' Compensation Branch at 1-800-370-3747.

CDC website: <https://www.cdc.gov/tb/default.htm>.

The CDC has published a document that provides information about the difference between latent TB infection and TB disease. The PDF file can be found: <http://tinyurl.com/qjc6t9d>.

About the ESHG

The FSIS Environmental Safety and Health Group (ESHG) is devoted to providing a safe and healthful work environment for FSIS employees. More information on safety topics can be found on the intranet site <http://www.tinyurl.com/FSIS-ESHG> or by email askemployeesafety@fsis.usda.gov