



Advice for international students on tuberculosis (TB) screening and treatment

Higher risk of TB

Some international students are much more likely to develop tuberculosis (TB) than people born in Australia.

If you are from a country in the following regions, it's likely you have been exposed to TB:

- Asia
- Africa
- the Western Pacific
- the Indian sub-continent
- South America
- Eastern Europe.

People from these regions are at a higher risk of being infected and getting sick from TB.

What is TB?

TB is an infectious disease that affects the lungs, other organs and bones. Medication can cure TB, but it can be fatal if left untreated. About one quarter of the world's population is infected with the bacteria that cause TB.

TB is one of the top 10 causes of death worldwide.

No cost for TB treatment

In Australia, you will not have to pay for TB diagnostic or treatment services undertaken in the public health system, including the cost of medications. Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC) may help to cover some costs for TB services provided through the private health system.

Visa is not affected

If you develop TB, you will not be asked to leave Australia. As long as you get the recommended treatment for TB, it will not affect the conditions of your student visa.

Symptoms

People with TB can:

- feel tired and unwell
- have a cough that lasts at least 3 weeks
- lose weight without meaning to
- have a fever
- sweat in bed at night

- cough up blood
- have chest pain
- have swollen lymph glands
- lose their appetite.

If you have any of these symptoms, see a doctor and show them this fact sheet.

Some people with active TB will have no symptoms.

How TB spreads

TB spreads through the air when a person with active TB coughs, sneezes, shouts, speaks or sings, and other people nearby breathe in the bacteria.

It is possible that you might have been exposed to TB without knowing it.

Some people with TB have no symptoms and may not know they have active TB disease.

Vaccination

The TB vaccine (BCG) helps protect young children against severe forms of TB. Even if you were vaccinated, you can still get TB.

TB checks

The Visa Medical Screen includes a chest x-ray to look for active or infectious TB in people from high-risk countries.

Many people will have latent or silent TB infection, which doctors cannot see on a chest x-ray.

Latent or silent TB does not cause any symptoms but can progress to active and infectious TB months or years after screening.

Where to get help after arriving in Australia

You can get help by talking to your doctor, university health service or local hospital. Show your doctor this fact sheet if you have any symptoms of TB.

You can also call [HealthDirect Australia](https://www.healthdirect.gov.au) 24-hours a day, 7 days a week for free health advice on 1800 022 222 (calls from landlines are free, mobile charges may apply).

Visit your state or territory health department's website using the links below:

- Australian Capital Territory: [Tuberculosis \(health.act.gov.au\)](https://www.health.act.gov.au)
- Victoria: [Tuberculosis \(health.vic.gov.au\)](https://www.health.vic.gov.au)
- New South Wales: [Tuberculosis \(health.nsw.gov.au\)](https://www.health.nsw.gov.au)
- Queensland: [Tuberculosis \(health.qld.gov.au\)](https://www.health.qld.gov.au)
- Northern Territory: [Tuberculosis \(health.nt.gov.au\)](https://www.health.nt.gov.au)
- Western Australia: [Tuberculosis \(health.wa.gov.au\)](https://www.health.wa.gov.au)
- South Australia: [Tuberculosis \(sahealth.sa.gov.au\)](https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au)
- Tasmania: [Department of Health \(health.tas.gov.au/\)](https://www.health.tas.gov.au/)

If you think you need an ambulance or your illness is critical or life threatening, call triple zero (000) for an ambulance immediately.