



Larry Hogan, Governor · Boyd K. Rutherford, Lt. Governor · Robert R. Neall, Secretary

RE: COVID-19 and TB

October 23, 2020

Dear Colleague,

We want to bring some concerning TB-related information to your attention and request your assistance with addressing this.

There has been a 40% decline in the reported diagnosis of active tuberculosis (TB) in Maryland since March of this year. This **significant and unexpected drop in reported cases** has been accompanied by reductions in monthly laboratory reporting ranging from 10-28% (April – August 2020). These dramatic reductions are of concern as case rates and TB laboratory reporting in Maryland have remained stable over the past five years. The Maryland Department of Health Center for TB Control and Prevention does not feel these reductions are representative of the true epidemiology of latent TB infection and active TB disease in the state.

We encourage you to consider TB in the differential diagnostic work up of individuals who are at high risk for either TB or SARs-CoV-2 infection, and/or who present with respiratory symptoms common to both. TB should be considered for individuals with a risk factor for TB who test negative for SARS-CoV-2.

The Maryland Center for TB Control and Prevention is tracking reported COVID-19 diagnoses in individuals with previous or current TB diagnoses. We have documented 41 persons with a past or present diagnosis of tuberculosis who have subsequently been diagnosed with COVID-19 (March – August 2020). Eight (8) of these persons were on treatment for TB at the time of their COVID-19 diagnosis; 2 of those individuals have since died of COVID-19 (~ 25% mortality).

The following table illustrates some of the symptoms, risk factors, and diagnostic recommendations for both TB and COVID-19. **TB, latent TB infection (LTBI) and COVID-19 are all reportable conditions in Maryland.**

COVID-19 and TB *

	TB	Risk Factors	COVID-19	Risk Factors
Symptoms	<p>Cough ≥ 3 weeks, fever and/or chills, chest pain, hemoptysis, shortness of breath, weight loss, night sweats, loss of appetite, extreme tiredness</p> <p><i>Symptoms develop gradually and persist/worsen if not treated.</i></p>	<p>Exposure or suspected exposure to a confirmed case. Born or lived outside the US. diabetes, HIV or other immunosuppression conditions. Socioeconomic conditions e.g., homelessness, ↓ access to health care, etc.</p>	<p>Cough (often dry), high fever, sore throat, shortness of breath, loss of taste and smell, may have difficulty breathing and severe respiratory distress.</p> <p><i>Symptoms usually appear quickly and persist for 7 days or longer.</i></p>	<p>Exposure or suspected exposure to a confirmed case. diabetes, HIV/ other immunosuppression conditions Socioeconomic conditions e.g., homelessness, ↓ access to health care, etc.</p>
Diagnostic Testing	<p>Tuberculin skin testing (TST) or IGRA blood test for TB (preferred method). Sputum or other biological specimen testing for acid-fast bacilli (AFB) smear and molecular testing and culture.</p>	<p>Consider testing for TB if individual has risk factors for TB and has had repeat negative tests for COVID-19.</p>	<p>Nasopharyngeal or oropharyngeal swab, sputum, or endotracheal aspirate or bronchoalveolar lavage for molecular testing.</p>	

* this table is not all-inclusive; readers are encouraged to access the references provided

Please consider TB in your diagnostic work ups for any individual who is at risk for TB and especially those who have already previously tested negative for COVID-19. Delayed TB diagnoses leads to increased community transmission, more severe disease, and increased risk for other respiratory illness such as COVID-19. If you have questions or concerns, please call your local health department or the Maryland Center for Tuberculosis Control and Prevention at 410-767-6698.

Sincerely,

David Blythe MD, MPH
 State Epidemiologist and Director, Infectious Disease Epidemiology & Outbreak Response Bureau

References:

- Maryland COVID-19 website: <https://coronavirus.maryland.gov/>
- MDH TB website: <https://phpa.health.maryland.gov/OIDPCS/CTBCP/pages/Home.aspx>
- CDC for additional information on both COVID-19 and TB: <https://www.cdc.gov/>
- Maryland LTBI reporting form: <https://phpa.health.maryland.gov/OIDPCS/CTBCP/SiteAssets/Pages/Forms/EditForm/LTBI%20Reporting%20Form.pdf>
- MDH Laboratory Administration: <https://health.maryland.gov/laboratories/pages/Home.aspx>