

Tuberculosis among Toronto’s Homeless and Underhoused Community in 2010

A total of 6 cases of tuberculosis (TB) among Toronto’s homeless/underhoused community were reported in 2010. Of the 6 cases, all were male, three had pulmonary TB, two had extrapulmonary TB, and one case had both. Four cases were born outside of Canada, and the remaining two were Canadian-born non-Aboriginals (see table 1 below). There were no Aboriginal/First Nation cases.

Toronto cases were included in this summary if they were reported in 2010; and their risk setting was “shelter” or the risk factor was “homeless” or “underhoused”. This included one recently arrived refugee living in a youth shelter, and three cases with historical use of shelters currently living in rooming houses, or found in a correctional facility. Four of the cases had a strain found historically in both the homeless and general populations in Toronto, and the remaining two had unique strains, likely acquired in their respective countries of birth. All of the cases had fully sensitive TB.

Method of Detection: Five of the cases self-presented for medical attention, either due to symptoms of tuberculosis or other conditions. The sixth case was identified during routine screening at a correctional facility.

Outcomes: Two of the cases died, with TB as a contributing factor for both deaths. Both of these cases had other serious health conditions, including one case with HIV. Three cases have successfully completed treatment, and the final case remains on treatment.

Table 1. Tuberculosis Cases in Toronto’s Homeless and Underhoused Community, 2010. (n=6)	
Variable	N (%)
Gender	
Male	6 (100)
Female	0
Average age at diagnosis (range)	45 (22-64)
Site of infection	
Pulmonary only	3 (50)
Pulmonary + extrapulmonary	1 (18)
Extrapulmonary only	2 (33)
Shelter Role*	
Client	6 (100)
Staff	0
Origin	
Canadian-born non Aboriginal	2 (33)
Born Outside of Canada	4 (67)

*“Shelter” refers to both traditional shelters, as well as drop-ins serving the underhoused community.

Contact Follow-up: The homeless/underhoused cases reported in 2010 had a total of 499 contacts; over 400 of the identified contacts were linked to one case that was highly infectious.

Of the 499 contacts, 339 were located, and 246 had some sort of testing (either a skin test, chest x-ray, or sputum sample). Seven of the eligible contacts started preventative therapy; two secondary cases were identified through contact follow-up of the highly infectious case.

In addition to case management and contact follow-up, the homeless and corrections TB team provided active case finding clinics and education sessions.

Sixty-three active case finding screening clinics were held at certain identified homeless shelters and drop-ins. At these clinics clients were screened for symptoms of TB; clients who were potentially symptomatic or who were known contacts of cases within the last 2 years had sputum samples taken. At the active case finding clinics held in 2010, staff screened a total of 1958 clients and 10 staff, and took 220 sputum samples, all of which were negative. Ten contacts of active TB cases were also located at the active case finding clinics.

A total of ten education sessions were held in a variety of settings, including homeless shelters, drop-in centres, and agencies that provide services to homeless and underhoused clients.