

# Community-Acquired Pneumonia: Could it be TB?

Delayed diagnosis of tuberculosis (TB) is all too common. It's hard to "Think TB" when there are very few cases in Wisconsin. Most healthcare providers will never see a person with TB disease. However, many WI TB patients have had at least one diagnosis of community-acquired pneumonia (CAP) in the months just before they were diagnosed with TB.

Delayed diagnosis while being treated for CAP has several effects:

1. More spread to persons around the person with TB, resulting in more persons with TB disease and TB infection.
2. Treatment with antibiotics for CAP can cause resistance to that drug, thus decreasing options for treating TB.
3. Treatment with antibiotics for CAP most frequently almost sterilizes the sputum, resulting in patient with smear negative, PCR-negative, but culture POSITIVE TB. This means that the person with TB disease is often out of isolation, continuing to spread disease in the community, for the six to eight weeks required for TB to grow in culture.

## Best Practices

In accordance with international guidance for CAP diagnosis and treatment, consideration of risk factors and testing for other diseases which may cause similar symptoms is appropriate.

### Know risk factors for TB

The major risk factors for TB in Wisconsin are:

Born in another country

Has known a person with TB disease

Either of these could have been 2 weeks ago or 85 years ago and still be a valid risk factor.

### If the person has risk factors for TB, please:

**Get a sputum sample for AFB smear, PCR, and culture BEFORE antibiotics are started.**  
Testing for TB at the WI State Laboratory of Hygiene is free for all persons with suspect TB.

### Get a chest Xray (CXR).

It's surprising how many people are treated for CAP several times, before a CXR is done that shows cavitory lesions or other signs characteristic of TB disease.

### Report the patient as a TB suspect to the local health department.

The health department can continue to obtain sputum samples from the patient at home, and also will evaluate the home for the presence of persons at risk for TB disease or infection.