

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT?

Most infections do not require treatment, just observation. However, if symptoms are persistent, or progressive organ damage is occurring, treatment may be required. The organisms are resistant to conventional antibiotics and some of the same drugs that are used to treat TB may be used.

Several different antibiotics may be used and many have side-effects, so close monitoring is important. Treatment can be from 6 months to 2 years or even longer. Some lymph node infections and skin lesions are sometimes surgically removed.



IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT MEDICATIONS USED TO TREAT NTM INFECTIONS

Please remember to take all of the medications each day as directed. If you forget to take the medication or stop taking the medication too early the infection may become more difficult to treat and become resistant to the antibiotics prescribed.

Also remember that all medications can have side effects. It's important to talk to your doctor about these including how to minimise, recognise and monitor medication side effects.

CAN NTM AND TB OCCUR TOGETHER?

In some patients, both TB and NTM are grown from the sputum. Often, the TB bacteria are seen first and the NTM is found later, even after TB treatment has finished. This probably reflects damage to the lung from TB with NTM entering the damaged lung area. It does not mean that the TB treatment has failed and usually does not require treatment.

HOW TO STAY WELL AND GET BETTER FASTER



Eat healthy food and get lots of rest. Exercise when you are feeling better.

Cut out cigarettes and alcohol. Cigarettes can damage your lungs. Try to stop smoking or cut down your smoking.

You should not drink alcohol while taking antibiotics.



WHERE TO ACCESS TREATMENT

NTM is treated by a respiratory specialist, ask your GP for a referral.

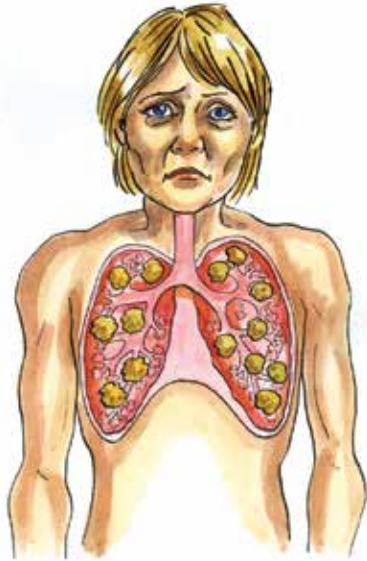


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This brochure has been adapted from a resource developed by Pam Banner and Dr David Michail.



NONTUBERCULOUS MYCOBACTERIA



WHAT CAUSES NTM INFECTIONS?

NTM are generally found in the environment – mainly in water and soil, but have also been found in dust, milk, food and some animals. They have been found in places such as hot tubs, public swimming pools, ice machines and water fountains and can survive for long periods in the environment. The bacteria may be found on the skin and in body excretions.



The bacteria can enter the body by breathing, eating or drinking or through a wound on the skin. NTM are not spread from person-to-person.

HOW SERIOUS ARE NTM INFECTIONS?

The presence of these bacteria are generally of no significance and usually do not cause problems in people. Some people are infected, but remain well. However, in some people an infection may result in disease which can involve the lung, skin, lymph nodes or other body parts. Only around 10% of infections require treatment.

WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS?

It is not known why NTM infect some people, however it is thought that risk factors for disease include lowered immunity, pre-existing lung diseases, heavy cigarette and alcohol use. The disease occurs more frequently in people living with HIV.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

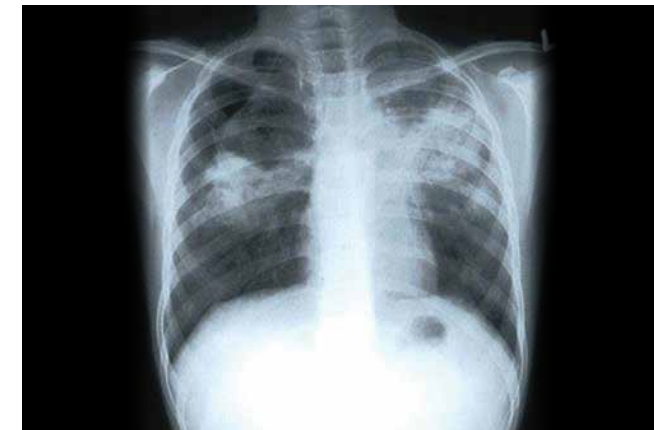
Symptoms depend on the organ involved. With lung involvement, symptoms are similar to other lung infections and include: cough, sometimes with blood in the sputum, fever, night sweats, weight loss, malaise, fatigue and loss of appetite and energy. NTM infections can also cause skin lesions, enlarged lymph glands, joint or bone pains.



HOW IS NTM DISEASE DIAGNOSED?

NTM disease is often hard to diagnose. NTM disease can mimic TB, it is important that TB is excluded in the diagnosis of NTM disease. Once a diagnosis of NTM has been made, tests are done to identify the type of bacteria that is present.

Diagnosis is usually made by medical and symptom review, chest x-ray and/or CT scan and a sample of sputum, lymph node, body fluids or tissue, is collected and sent to the laboratory for identification.



NONTUBERCULOUS MYCOBACTERIA

Nontuberculous mycobacteria (NTM) is a name for a group of bacteria, also known as Atypical Mycobacteria and Mycobacteria other than Tuberculosis (MOTT). There are over 100 species of NTM that have been found, with new ones regularly being identified. They are related to tuberculosis (TB) but are not the same bacteria, and generally they are less infectious and do not cause life-threatening disease.

Mycobacteria are a family of small bacilli that can be classified into 3 main groups:

- *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* complex (TB) which can cause tuberculosis
- *M. leprae* which causes Hansen's disease or leprosy
- Nontuberculous mycobacteria (NTM) which are all the other mycobacteria.

NTM can cause chronic disease which can be present for many years, however – unlike TB or leprosy, NTM is not contagious and is therefore not a public health concern.