



Key Takeaways for Employers as Tuberculosis Cases Surge in Kansas

Insights

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An ongoing tuberculosis outbreak in Kansas is alarming health officials and the general public, and you might be wondering how your workforce could be impacted or how you should respond. We'll explain what employers need to know about the surge of TB cases impacting the Kansas City area and what you should do to mitigate health, safety, and legal risks in your workplace.

What's Happening in Kansas?

A surge of tuberculosis cases has been impacting the Kansas City area since last January. [Data from state health officials](#) (which includes case counts as of Jan. 24) reflects:

- **67 active cases** (including 60 in Wyandotte County and seven in Johnson County) have been reported since 2024 – an unusually high number for anywhere in the U.S. in modern times. It's been widely reported that two individuals died last year from active TB infections related to this outbreak.
- **At least 79 cases of latent infections** (including 77 in Wyandotte County and two in Johnson County) have been reported since 2024 (though the actual number could be higher, since individuals with inactive TB have no symptoms and therefore are unlikely to seek treatment or testing). A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [fact sheet](#) states that people with inactive TB cannot spread TB to others but need treatment to prevent active TB disease. (According to the agency, one in 10 people with untreated inactive TB will develop active TB disease).

What's the Risk Level?

Here's the good news: state and local health officials report that there is "very low risk" of TB infection to the general public. In addition, while the Kansas outbreak was initially reported as one of the largest documented TB outbreaks in the U.S. since the CDC started tracking cases in the 1950s, state health officials [later clarified](#) that the current outbreak is the largest in the U.S. at this time "over the span of one year" after a CDC spokesperson pointed out larger U.S. outbreaks within the last decade.

Regardless, however, the TB outbreak in Kansas is record-breaking and raises serious health and safety concerns. Tuberculosis is a highly contagious bacterial disease that can be fatal without

safety concerns. Tuberculosis is a highly contagious bacterial disease that can be fatal without treatment (especially for individuals who have other underlying health conditions). According to the CDC, TB is spread through the air from one person to another, and TB germs can live in the air for several hours (especially in indoor areas or other places with poor air circulation) – posing significant risks to people who live and work in congested areas. And while TB usually responds to antibiotic treatments, there have been documented cases of drug-resistant TB, and treatment can take several months or longer.

What Should You Do?

Any workplace with multiple people could potentially be impacted by TB. While certain workplace settings (such as hospitals, homeless shelters, correctional facilities, and nursing homes) may have higher exposure risks, TB can also spread in other types of workplaces, such as factories or office settings. If you have employees who may be exposed to tuberculosis at work, you should take precautions to limit or prevent exposure.

- **Assess risks in your workplace.** While TB might not typically be on your radar, you should consider conducting a job hazard analysis to identify workers who are at risk of occupational exposure, in line with Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) recommendations applicable to other infectious diseases that may spread in the workplace.
- **Follow health officials' guidance.** Make sure to follow all CDC guidelines on limiting or preventing the spread of TB. Doing so may help you comply with the general duty clause under the federal Occupational Safety and Health Act. This might include, for example, providing personal protective equipment (such as disposable gloves, medical gowns, shoe covers, face covers, and respiratory protection) for employees working in close proximity to infected people. Higher-risk workplaces, such as hospitals and jails, should also ensure there is adequate ventilation in the workplace and monitor and track all known active TB cases attributed to the workplace, as well as employees who may be exposed to TB in the workplace.
- **Enforce prevention policies and encourage safety measures.** One of the best ways to limit any exposure in the workplace is to prevent infectious employees from coming to work. Employers can also encourage employees to follow hygienic practices in the workplace and monitor employees who do test positive for TB and work in conjunction with healthcare providers to ensure the infected employee is fit to return to work.
- **Work with counsel.** Work with counsel to ensure that your workplace safety policies and practices comply with all OSHA standards and any other applicable laws. Healthcare employers should be aware that days before President Trump took office, [OSHA abandoned a COVID-19 regulation in favor of pursuing a broader infectious disease standard](#). Now is the time for employers in the healthcare industry, as well as other industries where a potential for the spread of infectious disease exists (such as correctional facilities and laboratories), to take stock of internal practices and policies that address the spread of infectious disease in the workplace.

Conclusion

We will continue to monitor developments and provide updates, so make sure you are subscribed to [Fisher Phillips' Insight system](#) to get the most up-to-date information. If you have further questions, contact your Fisher Phillips attorney, the authors of this Insight, or any attorney on our [Workplace Safety Team](#).

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