What is Nontuberculous Mycobacteria (NTM) Disease?

Mycobacteria that are not part of the tuberculosis complex are called nontuberculous mycobacteria (NTM). These bacteria can cause disease when the body’s immune system is weakened or impaired. NTM disease is often discussed in the context of how it affects specific populations, such as individuals with weakened immune systems. However, it is important to note that NTM can affect anyone, and it is not limited to specific groups.

What causes NTM disease?

NTM disease can be caused by a variety of factors, including weakened immune systems, underlying health conditions, and certain environmental exposures. The disease can also be transmitted from person to person, although this is rare. NTM disease is often linked to certain occupations or activities, such as working with soil or water, or living in areas with high concentrations of these bacteria.

Who gets NTM disease?

NTM disease can affect anyone, regardless of age or gender. However, certain populations are at higher risk, including individuals with weakened immune systems, those living in areas with high concentrations of NTM bacteria, and those with underlying health conditions such as lung disease or heart disease.

What are the signs and symptoms of NTM lung disease?

The signs and symptoms of NTM lung disease can vary depending on the individual and the specific type of NTM bacteria. Common symptoms include coughing, shortness of breath, fever, night sweats, and weight loss. Other symptoms may include reddened areas of the skin, fluid or pus in the lungs, and skin rashes.

The BC Centre for Disease Control and Prevention provides information and resources to help individuals understand and manage NTM disease. It is important to seek medical attention if you suspect you may have NTM disease, as early treatment can improve outcomes.

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**How is NTM disease diagnosed?**

- When you are diagnosed with NTM disease, your doctor will test your sputum for NTM.
- If you have a high fever, cough, or other symptoms, your doctor may order additional tests to determine if you have NTM disease.

**How is NTM disease treated?**

- Treatment for NTM disease depends on the type of NTM and the severity of the infection.
- Some patients may be treated with antibiotics for a short period of time, while others may require long-term treatment.
- It is important to follow your doctor's instructions and complete the full course of treatment to prevent the disease from spreading.

**What do you need to do now?**

- Speak to your doctor about your symptoms and schedule an appointment to discuss your treatment options.
- Take your antibiotics exactly as prescribed by your doctor.
- Avoid contact with people who have NTM disease to prevent the spread of the infection.

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