

## TB a growing problem among immigrants in Toronto's homeless shelters, study finds

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A study of homeless people with tuberculosis in Canada's largest city found that almost one in five died within 12 months of being diagnosed.

The study in the journal *Emerging Infectious Diseases* identified 91 homeless people with active TB in Toronto from 1998 to 2007.

It also found that a growing proportion of tuberculosis cases in the city's homeless shelters – 40 per cent – are among immigrants.

Of these, 56 per cent involved strains not known to circulate among the homeless in Toronto and were likely acquired in other parts of the world.

Researcher Dr. Kamran Khan of St. Michael's Hospital says treatment of TB is often complicated by inadequate housing, substance dependence, language barriers and mental health problems.

Co-author Dr. Elizabeth Rea says there's been a lot of good work on preventing transmission of the airborne bacteria in recent years, and ventilation systems in homeless shelters have improved.

But she says more funding is needed to make further improvements.

TB is a serious contagious disease that can remain dormant for years. People with weakened immune systems are at greater risk of the active form.

Most cases are treatable, but some forms that are highly resistant to antibiotics can be life-threatening.