

# Infectious Disease

## Nontuberculous mycobacterium

(a.k.a. atypical mycobacterium, MAC or mycobacterium other than tuberculosis)



**WHAT IS NONTUBERCULOUS MYCOBACTERIUM?** Mycobacteria are a large group of bacteria which can cause disease in humans. *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* is a contagious disease which can cause serious pulmonary as well as other types of diseases and will not be discussed here. For more information on *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* please see <http://www.cdc.gov/tb/>

Non tuberculous mycobacterium (NTM) is a group within the *Mycobacterium* family which includes all the other mycobacteria which can cause pulmonary disease, skin disease, lymphadenitis or disseminated disease. These include **mycobacterium avian complex (MAC)** which consists of *M. avium* and *M. intracellulare*, *M. abscessus*, *M. chelonae*, and *M. fortuitum*; and less common strains such as *M. kansasii* and *M. xenopi*.

**WHAT IS NTM CAUSED BY?** NTM is not generally contagious and is contracted from the **environment**. Risk factors for contracting NTM are female sex, age greater than 50, thin, history of [smoking](#) or other **lung diseases** such as [COPD](#), [bronchiectasis](#) or **cystic fibrosis**.

**WHAT ARE SOME SYMPTOMS OF NTM?** Symptoms of NTM infection include [cough](#), coughing up blood, fever, chills, night sweats, bronchitis or pneumonia and fatigue.

**HOW IS NTM DIAGNOSED?** Diagnosis of NTM usually requires a chest x-ray or **CT scan** of the chest and **sputum culture** in which the organism grows. In some cases a [bronchoscopy](#) (a fiberoptic camera inserted into the lung via the nose or mouth) may be used in diagnosis.

**HOW IS NTM TREATED?** NTM becomes resistant to antibiotics easily and for this reason, treatment is with **several antibacterial agents**. Usually at least 3 drugs will be needed and treatment is long-term for **at least one year**.

**WHAT CAN I EXPECT ON MY FIRST VISIT TO P.C.C.S?** Chest x-ray and lab work will be done. A medical history and physical exam will be performed. [Pulmonary function testing](#) may be done. Follow up testing such as C.T. of the chest (if not done already) and [bronchoscopy](#) may be required prior to initiation of treatment.



For more information, visit **Pulmonary Critical Care & Sleep Medicine Consultants** online at [HoustonLungDocs.com](http://HoustonLungDocs.com)

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