

# Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy (TSE) Fact Sheet

## What is it?

Transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSE), also known as prion diseases (an infectious protein), are a group of rare degenerative brain disorders characterized by tiny holes that give the brain a "spongy" appearance. Other common diseases associated are kuru, fatal familial insomnia (FFI), and Gerstmann-Straussler-Scheinker Syndrome.

## How is it spread?

TSE can occur three ways: sporadically; as hereditary diseases; or through transmission from infected individuals. Transmission of TSE from infected individuals is rare. TSE cannot be transmitted through the air or through touching or through most other forms of casual contact. However, it may be transmitted through contact with infected tissue, body fluids, or contaminated medical instruments.

## What are the symptoms?

Common symptoms include personality changes, depression, and lack of coordination. Patients may also feel strange sensations, insomnia, confusion, memory problems and involuntary jerking.

## How is it prevented?

No current cure exists for TSE, so prevention is the main focus for health care. To prevent transmission of TSE, meat and farm animals are inspected by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to ensure products sold in Canada are free of prion illness. Buying inspected meats will help prevent transmission of this illness. Avoid contact with infected tissues. If a person is showing signs or symptoms of TSE illness they should seek medical attention.

## Other Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or call our Communicable Disease Program at 613-966-5500 x349. Toll Free 1-800-267-2803 | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | [www.hpepublichealth.ca](http://www.hpepublichealth.ca)

## References

- Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Overview of Canada's BSE Safeguards. Retrieved October 2012 from <http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/anim/dise/mala/bseesb/bseesbfs2e.shtml2>.
- National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. Transmissible Spongiform Encephalitis Information Page. Retrieved October 2012 from <http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/tse/tse.htm>

**CD-133**

2013/07/25

Public Health is committed to providing accessible programs and services to all. To request this or any other publication in an alternative format, please contact us by phone at 613-966-5500 or by email at [accessibility@hpeph.ca](mailto:accessibility@hpeph.ca)