

Tuberculosis (TB)

WHAT IS TB? TB or Tuberculosis is a disease caused by the bacteria *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. It can affect any part of the body but it usually attacks the lungs.

HOW IS TB SPREAD? TB is spread through the air from one person to another. The bacteria are put into the air when a person with TB of the lungs coughs or sneezes. People who are nearby may breathe in these bacteria and become infected.

When a person breathes in TB bacteria, it can settle in the lungs and begin to grow. From there, it can move to other parts of the body such as the kidneys, spine and brain.

TB in the lungs can be infectious (contagious) to others such as family members, friends and coworkers.

HOW DID I GET INFECTED? It is sometimes difficult to know how you were infected with TB because the bacteria can remain inactive in the body for many years before causing disease or they may never cause disease. If you have been infected with TB, but do not have active disease, you:

- have no symptoms and do not feel sick
- cannot spread TB to others
- usually have a positive skin test reaction
- can develop TB later in life if you do not have preventative therapy (medication)

Anyone can get TB...people of all nationalities, races and incomes.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE ACTIVE TB DISEASE? You will have symptoms of TB, depending on where it is growing in your body. Usually, TB bacteria grow in the lungs and may cause:

- a bad cough lasting longer than 2 weeks
- pain in the chest
- coughing up blood or sputum (thick mucous from deep inside the lungs)
- weakness or fatigue

- weight loss, loss of appetite
- fever and chills, sweating at night

There are other diseases that may cause similar symptoms. To determine if you have TB, your doctor may order specific tests such as a TB skin test, chest x-ray, sputum (phlegm) cultures and bronchoscopy.

TB is spread through the air. You can't catch TB from clothes, dishes, sharing utensils, food, handshakes or sitting on toilet seats.

HOW IS TB TREATED? There is good news for people with active TB—it can almost always be cured with medicine. You will need to take several different drugs and it's very important to take your pills as often as your doctor says. Even if you feel better, don't stop taking your pills. TB heals slowly. It takes many months. If you stop your pills too soon, TB can come back and the same pills may not work the second time around.

HOW DO I KEEP FROM SPREADING THE DISEASE TO OTHERS? You need to stay home from work or school until you are no longer infectious so that you don't spread TB to other people.

Cover your mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.

After taking your medicine for a few weeks, you will feel better but only your doctor can tell you when you can return to work or school.

If you are sick enough with TB to go to a hospital, you may be put into a private room with special air vents to keep TB from spreading.

Your door will need to remain closed to maintain this ventilation. You must stay in the room so that you will not spread TB.

People who care for you will wear a special mask to protect themselves. If you have to leave the room for a test or procedure, you will be asked to wear a face mask.

WHAT ABOUT WHEN I GO HOME? There are things you can do at home to protect those who are near you:

- **Take your medicine:** this is the most important thing you can do.
- Always cover your mouth with a tissue when you cough, sneeze or laugh. Put the tissue in a closed paper bag and throw it away.
- Do not go to work or school. Separate yourself from others and avoid close contact with anyone. Sleep in a bedroom away from other family members.
- Air out your room often. TB spreads in small, closed spaces where air doesn't move. Put a fan in your window to blow out (exhaust) air that may be filled with TB bacteria. If you open other windows in the room, the fan will also pull in fresh air. This will reduce the chances that TB bacteria stay in the room and infect someone who breathes the air.

TB is treatable and curable.

After you take your medicine for 2-3 weeks, you may no longer be able to spread TB to others but this can only be confirmed by a lab test. Check with your doctor to see when it is safe to go back to your daily routine.

WHAT IS THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT'S ROLE? Your local health department will contact you to ask you to identify those people who may have spent time with you such as family members, friends and coworkers. They may need to be tested for TB infection so that preventative therapy (medicine) can be given to keep them from developing active TB.



INFECTION CONTROL DEPARTMENT