



Tuberculosis Facts



What is tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis is a disease often called TB or coughing disease. It is spread by bacteria that can float in the air. The TB bacteria may spray into the air if a person with TB disease coughs, sings or sneezes. The people nearby can then breathe TB bacteria into their lungs. TB has two forms: TB infection and TB disease.

TB Infection

What is TB infection?

In most people, the immune system is strong enough to create a wall around the TB bacteria when it is breathed in. This prevents the bacteria from causing illness. People who have TB infection cannot spread TB to others.

What are the symptoms of TB infection?

People with TB infection are not sick. They will not have any symptoms. A skin test on the forearm is used to find out if a person has TB infection. The test is “positive” if a swelling the size of a dime or bigger appears 48 to 72 hours after the skin test is done. This means the person probably has TB infection. If the skin test is positive the person will have other tests done, like a chest X-ray. These tests make sure the person does not have TB disease.

People who are HIV-positive may have a negative skin test even if the TB bacteria

are in their body. Other tests may be needed to determine if the person has TB.

It is important to tell your health care provider if you have ever had a “positive” reaction to a TB skin test before, or if you have been treated with TB drugs.

How is TB infection treated?

Your health care provider may recommend medicine to keep you from getting TB disease and becoming sick. This is called “preventive” treatment. It takes 6 to 12 months to kill the TB bacteria. Unless you kill the TB bacteria with the right medicine, they will stay in your body and may cause TB disease later on.

The most common preventive medicine is called INH. Most people can take INH without problems, however, call your health care provider if you have any of these symptoms :

- Loss of appetite
- Feel sick to your stomach
- Rash
- Itching
- Brown or very dark urine
- Yellow skin

You may need blood tests to check on these side effects. Tell your health care provider if you do not feel well when you are taking TB preventive medication.

TB Disease

What is TB Disease?

Most people with TB infection will not get sick; however, some people will get sick and have TB disease.

TB disease usually attacks the lungs, but sometimes it attacks the kidneys, brain, spine or other areas of the body. If you have TB germs in your lungs or throat you can spread the disease to other people. All people with TB disease need to be treated to prevent the spread of TB to others and to cure them of the illness.

What are the symptoms of TB disease?

If TB disease is in your lungs, you may :

- Cough a lot
- Cough up mucous or phlegm or blood
- Have chest pain when you cough or breathe

If you have TB disease anywhere in your body, you may:

- Have a fever
- Sweat at night
- Lose your appetite
- Lose weight
- Feel weak
- Have problems in the part of your body with the TB disease

What causes TB disease?

If TB bacteria are in your lungs or throat, you can spread the disease to others. Always cover your mouth when you cough. Avoid being around people until your health care provider says you cannot spread TB germs. This is usually after two or three weeks of treatment.

Who is most at most risk for TB disease?

- People who got TB infection in the last two or three years
- People with lung scars that show on their chest X-rays
- People who are HIV-positive
- People who are alcoholics or injection drug users
- People with diabetes and certain types of cancers
- People who are very thin or who do not eat well

Only a health care provider can tell if you have TB disease. A chest X-ray will usually show if you have the disease in your lungs. A TB skin test and tests on phlegm that you cough up are also important.

How is TB disease treated?

TB bacteria are strong. To kill them you must take medicine for six to nine months. A few people may have side effects but if you stop taking your TB medicine too soon you will not be cured. In fact, you may get sicker because the TB bacteria become stronger and you might need stronger medicine for a long time. If you do have side effects, you will have blood tests taken and your health care provider will help you to manage them.

How can I reduce the risk of TB disease?

If you have a cough for more than three weeks, or have any of the symptoms listed above, you should see your health care provider. If you have TB germs in your lung or throat you can spread the disease to others. Avoid being around other people until your health care provider says you can no longer spread the TB germs. It is important to complete all your medication according to your schedule to prevent the TB bacteria from becoming stronger or causing you to be sick again later. Not completing medications can mean that you are not cured.