

Tuberculosis (TB)

What is Tuberculosis (TB) Disease?

Tuberculosis (TB) is caused by a bacteria (*Mycobacterium tuberculosis*). The bacteria (germs) can attack any part of your body, but they usually attack the lungs.

How is TB Spread?

TB is spread through the air from person to person. The bacteria get into the air when a person who has active TB disease of the lungs or throat sneezes, coughs, speaks or sings. When a person nearby breathes in the germs, the bacteria can settle in the lungs and grow.

What is Latent Tuberculosis Infection?

Most people who breathe in TB bacteria are able to fight the bacteria. The bacteria are in the body but are inactive (or “sleeping”). This is called latent tuberculosis infection.

If you have latent TB, you:

- do not feel sick
- do not have symptoms
- cannot spread TB to others
- usually have a positive skin test reaction or blood test
- usually have a normal chest X-ray and sputum test
- can develop TB later in life if not treated for latent TB.

Many people who have latent TB do not develop TB disease. In some people, especially those who have a weakened immune system, the bacteria will become active and cause active TB disease.

What is Active TB Disease?

TB bacteria become active if they keep growing and the immune system cannot stop them. The result is active TB disease. People with active TB disease are sick and may be able to spread the bacteria to others.

Some people develop active TB disease shortly after becoming infected, before their immune system can fight the TB bacteria. Other people get sick later in life when their immune system becomes weak for another reason.

What are the Symptoms of Active TB Disease?

Tuberculosis usually settles in the lungs. This may cause:

- a cough that lasts for 3 weeks or longer
- chest pain
- coughing up blood.

Other symptoms include:

- weakness or fatigue
- weight loss
- no appetite
- chills
- fever
- night sweats.

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How is TB Found?

There are 2 types of tests that look for TB bacteria in your body:

- **TB skin test.** Your health care provider will inject a small amount of testing fluid (tuberculin) under the skin of your arm. Two or three days later, they will measure your reaction to the test.
- **QuantiFERON® (TB Gold test).** Your health care provider will take a small amount of your blood and send it to a lab to tell if you have TB bacteria in your body.

If you have a positive skin or blood test, your health care provider may do more tests to tell if you have latent (sleeping) TB or active TB disease:

- **chest X-ray.** Your health care provider will take a picture of your lungs. If the TB bacteria have affected your lungs, a chest X-ray will show where the infection is located.
- **sputum test.** Your health care provider may test some of the phlegm you cough up. It will be looked at under a microscope to see if there are TB bacteria.

How is TB Treated?

Both latent (sleeping) and active TB disease can be treated with medicine.

If you have active TB disease, you will need to take several types of medicine. This will help to kill all of the bacteria.

Take your medicines exactly as directed. Treatment may last 4, 6 or 9 months. This depends on the medicine you receive.

If you have latent TB infection, you will be given medicine so you do not develop TB disease. Treatment can last from 3 to 9 months. This depends on the medicine you receive.

What are the Side Effects of TB Medicine?

TB medicine is safe. Sometimes, the medicine may cause side effects. Talk with your health care provider about side effects before starting the prescription.

How Can You Prevent the Spread of TB?

To prevent the spread of TB (if you have active TB disease in the lungs or throat):

- Take your medicine exactly as your health care provider tells you.
- Until you are no longer able to spread the bacteria (usually 2 to 3 weeks after treatment), you should:
 - Separate yourself from others and avoid close contact with anyone.
 - Sleep in a different bedroom away from family members.
 - Stay home from work or school.
 - Wear a mask when you leave your house.

You cannot get infected with the TB bacteria through shaking hands, sitting on toilet seats or sharing dishes or utensils with an infected person.

Your health care provider and a local public health nurse will be with you to make sure you are taking your medicine as directed.

They will let you know when you are no longer able to spread the bacteria and can safely return to work or school and other activities.

Adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.