



Tuberculosis Fact Sheet

What is TB?

Tuberculosis (TB) is an infectious disease caused by a bacteria which usually affects the lungs. However, other parts of the body can also be affected such as the kidney, spine, and brain.

How is TB spread?

When someone with TB disease of the lung coughs, sneezes, laughs, or sings, TB germs get into the air. People who share the same air space with this person may breathe in these germs. It is not spread by shaking hands, sharing food or drink, or touching bed linens or toilet sheets.

Who gets TB?

Anyone can get TB. People at greater risk are family members, friends, and coworkers who share the same air space with the person who has TB disease of the lungs. Others at risk include the elderly, homeless, prisoners, nursing home residents, alcoholics, injection drug users, people with medical conditions such as diabetes, HIV infection (the virus that causes AIDS), certain types of cancer, and people who are underweight.

What are symptoms of TB?

General symptoms may include feeling weak or sick, weight loss, fever and night sweats. Persons with TB of the lung

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may have complaints of cough, chest pain, and/or coughing up blood. Other symptoms depend on the particular part of the body that is affected.

What is the difference between Latent TB Infection and TB disease?

- Latent TB infection (LTBI) – have TB germs in their body but are not sick because the germs are not active. Usually have a positive TB skin test reaction or positive TB blood test. They cannot spread the germ to others. These people may develop TB disease in the future if the TB germs become active.
- TB disease – usually have one or more of the symptoms of TB and are sick because the TB germs are active and multiplying in their body. People with TB disease in their lungs can spread TB germs to others. For people whose immune systems are weak the risk of developing TB disease is much higher than for people with normal immune systems.

How can I tell if I have TB?

A TB skin test or blood test is given to detect TB infection. If the test is positive, a chest x-ray and other exams will be done to determine whether you have LTBI or TB disease. You can get TB tests at your local health department or you may go to your private doctor.

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Who should be tested for TB?

- People who have spent time with someone who has TB disease
- People from a country where TB disease is common
- People who live or work in high-risk settings
- Health-care workers who care for patients at increased risk for TB disease
- Infants, children and adolescents exposed to adults who are at increased risk for LTBI or TB disease

What is the treatment for TB?

- LTBI – Some persons with LTBI may need to take the drugs to prevent TB disease. Without treatment, on average 1 in 10 people with latent TB infection will get sick with TB disease in the future. These drugs are usually taken for 6 to 12 months.
- TB disease – Tuberculosis drugs (antibiotics) are recommended for persons with TB disease. TB disease can be treated by taking several drugs for 6 to 9 months. There are 10 drugs currently approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for treating TB.

What can be done to stop the spread of TB?

The patient must take the TB drugs as prescribed by the doctor and to cover his/her nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing. Wash your hands after coughing or

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sneezing. Limit or avoid close contact for a prolonged time with known TB patients in crowded, enclosed environments.

What is multi-drug resistant TB?

Multi-drug resistant TB can develop when TB patients do not take their TB medication as prescribed by the doctor. It makes TB more difficult to treat. When resistance occurs, one or more of the TB drugs can no longer kill the TB germs.

*For further information, contact the
Oklahoma City-County Health Department
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