

Tuberculosis (TB)

Tuberculosis or TB is a disease caused by germs called bacteria that most often affects the lungs. You can get infected with TB when you breathe in the germs. You are at a higher risk to get TB if you have a weak immune system. This system can be weakened by poor diet, illness, medicines, stress and other causes.

Types of infection

There are two types of TB infection, latent and active.

Latent infection is when you may have no signs of TB. The bacteria are in your body, but they are not active. You will not feel sick or spread TB to others. Skin or blood tests will be positive for TB. Treatment is still needed to prevent you from getting active TB later.

Active infection is when you have signs of the disease. You are able to spread the disease to others when you breathe, cough, sing or laugh and other people breathe in the TB germs. Without treatment, TB can cause serious damage to the lungs and death.

Signs

TB in the lungs can cause these signs:

- Cough that lasts more than 3 weeks or won't go away
- Fever and chills
- Weight loss or loss of appetite
- Feeling weak and tired
- Chest pain
- Night sweats

Testing

A skin test will be done to see if you are infected. A positive test means that you have been infected. If your test is positive, your doctor may also use a blood test, a chest x-ray and tests of the sputum you cough up to see if you have TB. Your family members and others living with you will also be skin tested to check if they also are infected.

A negative test often means that you are not infected. The skin test may not react if you have a weak immune system. Your doctor may check for TB if your skin test is negative, but you still have signs.

Medicines

If you have a positive skin test or have TB, you will be started on medicines.

- For latent infection, you may need to take medicine for 3 to 9 months.
- For active TB, medicine treatment may be needed for 6 to 12 months or more.

Take your medicines as directed. You may need more than one type of medicine for TB.

- **You need to take all of your medicines for as long as your doctor orders.**
- **Do not stop taking them, even if you feel better.**

Skipping doses or stopping medicines early can cause:

- The spread of TB to others.
- The infection to come back.
- The germs to become resistant to the medicine. This means the germs are harder to stop with the medicines available, making it harder to treat.

Most often, after 2 to 3 weeks of medicine treatment for active TB, you are no longer contagious. This means you will not pass TB germs to others, but you still need to take your medicine as ordered.

Protect yourself and others

- Wash your hands well with soap and water or use alcohol based hand sanitizer before and after meals.
- Keep your body strong. Eat 3 meals and drink 6 to 8 glasses of fluid each day.
- Go to all your doctor appointments.
- **Always cover your mouth** when you cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw it away. You can also cough into your sleeve if you do not have a tissue. Then, wash your hands.

Hospital care

If you are sick enough that you need to be in the hospital, steps will be taken to prevent others from getting TB.

- You will be isolated in your room until you have been on TB medicines for 2 to 3 weeks or until your sputum is not infected.
- Anyone who comes into your room will wear a mask.
- The door to your room will be closed.
- You will need to wear a mask when you are out of your room.

Call your doctor right away if you:

- Have a worse cough.
- Cough up blood.
- Have trouble breathing.
- Lose weight even when you are eating a good diet.
- Have fevers or night sweats.
- Have brown urine or gray stools.
- Have yellow skin or yellow eyes.

Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have any questions or concerns.