

Frequently Asked Questions: Tuberculosis (TB)

What is TB?

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by a bacterium called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. The bacterium usually attacks the lungs, but can affect any part of the body such as the kidney, spine, and brain.

How is TB spread?

Active TB is spread through the air from one person to another. Bacteria are put into the air when a person with active TB disease coughs, sneezes, speaks, or sings. People nearby may breathe in these bacteria and may become infected.

How is TB **NOT** spread?

Active TB is NOT spread by shaking someone's hand, sharing food or drink, touching bed linens or toilet seats, or sharing toothbrushes.

How long is a person contagious with TB?

A person with active TB is contagious until he/she has been on appropriate medical treatment for several weeks and their doctor ensures there are no TB bacteria in their sputum (phlegm).

What are the symptoms of active TB?

There are many symptoms in people who have active TB. They include:

- Having a bad cough that lasts 3 weeks or longer
- Feeling pain in the chest
- Coughing up blood or sputum
- Being very weak or tired
- Losing Weight
- Not feeling hungry (loss of appetite)
- Having chills, fever, or sweating at night
- Weakness/Lethargy

Who is at risk for developing active TB?

People who have been in close contact with a person with active TB are most likely to develop TB. People who have weakened immune systems are also at higher risk. This can include people with:

- Diabetes
- Cancer
- Kidney disease
- HIV Infection

Close contact can be defined as living in the same house or being in the same room with the person for extended periods of time.

How is TB diagnosed?

TB can be diagnosed with either a skin test or blood test. Results will be given in 48-72 hours. If you have a positive result to either of the tests, you will be further evaluated to see if you have latent TB infection (infected with TB but not symptomatic and not contagious) or active TB.

How is TB treated?

Active TB can be treated by taking antibiotics for 6 to 12 months or longer under the care of TB specialists. It is very important that people who have active TB disease finish the medicine and take the drugs exactly as ordered.

What is Latent TB?

Not everyone infected with TB germs get sick. People who are infected, but are not sick, have what is called latent TB infection. People with latent TB infection have TB germs in their body, but they are not sick because the germs lie dormant (sleeping) in their body.

People with latent TB infection do not have symptoms and cannot spread the germs to others.

However, these people may develop TB symptoms in the future. To prevent developing TB, people with latent TB infection can take antibiotic treatment under the guidance of a TB specialist.

What is Active TB?

People with active TB are sick from the large number of TB germs that are active in their body. They usually have one or more of the symptoms of TB. People with active TB may spread TB germs to others. Active TB needs to be treated with antibiotic medication. If they are not treated, a person with active TB can have serious health problems and die.

What should I do if I think I've been exposed someone with active TB? Can I bring it home to my family?

People with active TB are most likely to spread the germs to people they spend time with every day, such as family members or coworkers. If you have been around someone who has active TB, or if you feel concerned you may be experiencing the symptoms of active TB you should go to your doctor or your local health department for tests.

You cannot bring a TB infection home if you have been exposed to an active TB case and are not sick. You can only infect others with TB if you are experiencing symptoms of active TB.

What can I do to prevent myself from getting TB?

In many countries, active TB is much more common than in the United States. Travelers should avoid close contact with known TB patients in crowded, enclosed environments (for example, clinics, hospitals, prisons, or homeless shelters). If a person knows that they will be in an environment where they could be exposed to active TB, they could use a personal respiratory protective device to avoid breathing in TB germs. Those who have frequent contact with populations that have higher rates of active TB should receive regular TB tests.

For more information visit

*www.cdc.gov/tb/ or www.ongov.net/health/TB.html
and like us on Facebook for updates*

Sources: New York State Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)



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