



What You Should Know About Tuberculosis



What Is Tuberculosis (TB)?

TB is a disease caused by the bacteria *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. The bacteria usually attack the lungs, but TB bacteria can attack any part of the body including the kidneys, spine, and brain. People with TB who are not sick have what is called latent TB infection (LTBI). People with TB who become sick have TB disease.

What are the Symptoms?

People with LTBI do not feel sick, do not have any symptoms, and cannot spread TB to others. Some people with LTBI go on to get TB disease later.

Symptoms of TB disease depend on where in the body the TB bacteria are growing. TB disease in the lungs may cause symptoms like a bad cough that lasts 3 weeks or longer, pain in the chest, and coughing up blood or phlegm from deep inside the lungs. Other symptoms of TB disease include weakness or tiredness, weight loss, loss of appetite, chills, fever, and sweating at night.

How Serious is TB Disease?

If not treated properly, TB disease can be fatal. There is good news. People with TB disease can be treated if they seek medical help.

How Is It Spread?

TB is spread through the air from one person to another. The bacteria are put in the air when a person with TB disease of the lungs or throat coughs, sneezes, speaks, or sings. People nearby may breathe in these bacteria and become infected. You cannot get TB from shaking someone's hand, sharing food, touching clothing, or toilet seats.

People with TB disease are most likely to spread it to people they spend time with every day. This includes family members, friends, coworkers, and schoolmates.

How Can I Protect Myself?

You should be screened for TB if you:

- Have spent time with a person known or suspected to have TB disease
- Have HIV infection or another condition that weakens your immune system
- Have symptoms of TB disease
- Are from a country where TB disease is very common (most countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Asian, Eastern Europe, or Russia)
- Live in a homeless shelter, migrant camp, prison or jail, or a nursing home
- Inject illegal drugs

If you have LTBI, you may need to take medication to keep you from developing TB disease. There are several treatment options. You and your health care provider can decide which one is best for you.

What are the Tests for TB Infection?

A TB skin test or TB blood test may be used to find out if you are infected with TB. If the test is positive, your medical provider will examine you and order other tests like a chest x-ray.

How Is TB Disease Treated?

If you have TB disease, you will need to take several different antibiotics. Taking several medicines will do a better job of killing all the bacteria and keeping them from becoming resistant to the medicines. TB medicine must be taken regularly and only as directed by your medical provider. A public health nurse can help make sure you are not having any side effects.

For More Information

Monterey County Health Department
Tuberculosis Control Unit

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www.mtyhd.org

Centers for Disease Control and
Prevention (CDC)

www.cdc.gov/tb