Tuberculosis Fact Sheet

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by a bacterium called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. TB is a disease that spreads from person to person through the air. TB usually affects the lungs. The bacteria are put into the air when a person with TB of the lung coughs, sneezes, laughs or sings. TB can also affect other body parts such as the brain, kidney, or spine. TB is a disease that can be cured if treated properly.

TB can affect anyone of any age

Anyone can get TB, but some people are at higher risk. Those at higher risk are:

- Infants and small children
- People who share the same breathing space (family, friends, co-workers) with someone who has the TB disease
- People who live in crowded housing, have poor nutrition, and have poor health care
- Homeless people
- People born in countries where a lot of people have TB
- Nursing home residents
- Prisoners
- Alcoholics and injection drug users
- People with medical conditions such as diabetes, kidney failure, and those with weakened immune systems (such as HIV or AIDS)

TB infection is different from TB disease

People with TB infection (without disease) have the bacteria that cause TB in their body. It is often called latent TB infection (LTBI). They are not sick because the germ lies inactive in their body. They cannot spread the germ to others. Medications are often prescribed for these people to prevent them from developing TB disease in the future. Typically they take 1-2 pills a day for 6 to 9 months.

People with TB disease are sick from bacteria active in their body. They usually have one or more TB symptoms. These people can give the infection to others. Medications can cure TB disease. Usually 4 medications are given in the first two months followed by two medications for at least four more months.

TB Symptoms

Feeling weak or sick, rapid weight loss (over a few weeks or months), fever, or night sweats. Symptoms of TB of the lungs may include cough, chest pain, or coughing up blood. Other symptoms depend on the particular part of the body that is affected.

A skin test can tell you if you have TB infection

You can get a TB skin test from a doctor or local health department. A negative skin test usually means the person is not infected. However, the test may be false negative in a person who has been recently infected (it usually takes 2 to 10 weeks after exposure to a person with TB disease for the skin test to be positive). The test may also be false negative if the person's immune system is not working properly. A positive skin test reaction usually means that the person has been infected with TB. It does not necessarily mean that the person has TB disease. Other tests, such as an x-ray or sputum sample, are needed to see if the person has TB disease.

If you have TB infection or disease:

- Get all tests required by your doctor
- Keep all your TB appointments
- Take all your TB medications as prescribed. Avoid alcohol and avoid getting pregnant.
- If your doctor told you to stay home, do so until your doctor tells you it is okay to return to work or school. Do not have visitors (especially children) until your doctor says it is okay.

If you have a positive TB skin test, you can get a chest x-ray appointment. Call 1-800-722-4794

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