

How to Prevent the Spread of Tuberculosis



Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by a germ (bacteria). It's spread from person to person through the air. A person with TB disease of the throat or lungs who coughs, speaks, or sings can unknowingly put the bacteria into the air. Uninfected people nearby can breathe in the TB bacteria and get infected.

TB may infect the lungs and other parts of the body, such as the kidneys, bones, or the brain. TB can even be fatal. There are 2 forms of TB: inactive (latent TB infection) and active (TB disease).

Inactive TB (latent TB infection)

If you have inactive TB:

- You've been exposed to TB. There are TB bacteria in your body, but you have no symptoms and are not sick. The only way to know if you have an inactive TB infection is to have a skin test or a blood test for TB.
- You can't spread inactive TB to others.
- You may develop active TB disease if you don't get treatment or your immune system is weakened. This can happen if you are older, are taking immune-suppressing medicines, or are living with HIV infection, for example.

Active TB (TB disease)

If you have active TB:

- Symptoms may include a lasting cough, coughing up phlegm, extreme tiredness (fatigue), coughing up blood, chest pain, sweating at night, fever, loss of appetite, and weight loss. These are very common symptoms of active TB of the lungs or throat. TB of the lungs is the most common type of active TB.
- If you have TB of the lungs or throat, you can spread active TB to others. Your family, friends, and people you work with closely should be tested. If you have active TB of another part of your body, ask your healthcare provider if you are infectious to others. Ask if those you've had close contact with should be tested.
- Take all medicine until it's done. TB disease can almost always be cured. But you may get sick again if you don't take all your medicine, even if you feel better.

Who's at risk

Anyone who's ever had contact with a person with active TB (especially TB of the lungs or throat) can get TB. Groups of people believed to be at high risk for TB include:

- People from countries with high rates of TB
- Residents and employees of long-term care facilities (such as nursing homes and prisons)
- People who don't get medical care (including the poor and the homeless)
- People who use illegal injected drugs
- People who have HIV infection or other health risk factors (such as diabetes and end-stage renal disease)

Important:

If you think you're at high risk of TB or have been exposed to someone with the disease, get tested. When you do get tested, ask your healthcare provider if your family members and friends should also get tested.

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