

Tuberculosis (TB)

Tuberculosis (TB) is an infection that usually affects the lungs. It can be treated with antibiotics but can be serious if not treated. There's a vaccine that helps protect some people who are at risk from TB.

Treatment for tuberculosis (TB)

The main treatment for tuberculosis (TB) is to take antibiotics for at least 6 months.

If TB has spread to your brain, spinal cord or the area around your heart, you may also need to take steroid medicine for a few weeks.

If you have TB but do not have symptoms (latent TB) you usually need to take antibiotics for 3 to 6 months.

Important

It's important to take your antibiotics correctly and until you've completed the course, even if you feel better. If you stop your treatment early, TB could come back.

Causes of tuberculosis (TB)

Tuberculosis (TB) is caused by bacteria. It can spread through close contact with people who have TB and have symptoms (active TB).

When someone with active TB coughs, they release small droplets containing the bacteria. You can catch TB if you regularly breathe in these droplets over a long period of time.

Some people have TB in their body but do not get ill or have any symptoms (latent TB). This type of TB cannot be spread to others, but it can turn into active TB in the future.

People who are more likely to get TB

Anyone can get TB, but some people are more likely to get it or get more seriously ill from it, including people who:

- spend a lot of time with someone who has active TB, such as people living in the same house
- were born in or lived in an area where TB is more common

- have a weakened immune system, such as people with HIV, a kidney transplant or who are having certain treatment like chemotherapy
- are under 5 years of age
- live in overcrowded or unhealthy conditions, such as people who are homeless
- regularly smoke, drink alcohol or take drugs
- have had TB before and it was not treated properly

Tuberculosis (TB) vaccination

There is a vaccine for tuberculosis (TB) called the BCG vaccine.

It's recommended for some people who are at higher risk of catching TB or getting seriously ill from it, including:

- babies who live in areas of the UK where TB is more common
- babies and children who live with someone who has TB
- babies and children who were born or lived in a country where TB is more common
- babies and children whose parents or grandparents were born in a country where TB is more common
- people aged 35 and under who are spending more than 3 months in a country where TB is more common
- people at risk of getting TB through their work, such as healthcare workers who work with people who have TB

How is TB treated?

Your healthcare provider will figure out the best treatment for you based on:

- *How old you are*
- *Your overall health and past health*
- *How sick you are*
- *How well you can handle specific medicines, procedures, or therapies*
- *How long the condition is expected to last*
- *Your opinion or preference*

Treatment may include:

- *Short-term hospitalization*
- *For latent TB which is newly diagnosed: Usually a 6 to 12 month course of antibiotic called isoniazid will be given to kill off the TB organisms in the body.*

Some people with latent TB may be treated with a shorter course of 2 antibiotics for only 3 months.

- For active TB: Your healthcare provider may prescribe 3 or more antibiotics in combination for 6 to 9 months or longer. Examples include: isoniazid, rifampin, pyrazinamide, and ethambutol. People usually begin to improve within a few weeks of the start of treatment. After several weeks of treatment with the correct medicines, the person is usually no longer contagious, if treatment is carried through to the end, as prescribed by a healthcare provider.

What are the complications of TB?

If TB is not treated early or if treatment isn't followed, permanent lung damage can result.

Can TB be prevented?

If you will be spending time with a person or people with active TB, wear a face mask and try not to stay in a small enclosed space with poor ventilation. People who work in situations where there is a high risk for encountering people infected with TB, such as healthcare workers, should be tested for TB on a routine basis. In countries outside the U.S. where TB is more common, a childhood vaccine is often given.