

TUBERCULOSIS — TB

WHAT IS TB?

TB is a contagious disease caused by TB germs. TB usually attacks the lungs but can affect any part of the body. TB has been around for centuries.

HOW IS IT SPREAD?

TB is spread from person to person through the air. TB is spread when someone sick with TB in the lungs, coughs or sneezes. It is not highly contagious. Close, prolonged or regular contact with someone who is sick with TB disease is needed to spread this disease.

WHAT IS TB INFECTION?

Most people who breathe in TB germs are able to stop them from growing. The immune system traps the TB germs and keeps them inactive. This is called TB infection and these people:

- Do not feel sick/have no symptoms
- Cannot spread TB germs
- Have a positive skin test (note: people with medical conditions that weaken the immune system such as diabetes, HIV or cancer may have a negative skin test even though they are infected with TB - people in this category should speak with their doctor)
- May develop active TB disease later in life

WHAT IS TB DISEASE?

TB germs become active when the body's immune system cannot stop the germs from growing. The active TB germs begin to grow and cause damage to the body. Symptoms of TB disease are:

- Cough (lasting longer than 3 weeks)
- Fever/chills/night sweats
- Feel tired
- Unexplained weight loss/loss of appetite

If the TB disease is in another part of the body, the symptoms will depend on where the TB is growing, for example swollen lymph node or joint pain.

WHAT ARE THE TESTS FOR TB?

Screening for TB is done by a skin test. A positive skin test means a person has the TB germ in their body. A physical examination, chest x-ray and sputum (mucous coughed up from the lungs) are done to check for TB disease.

HOW IS TB TREATED?

People with TB infection may benefit from medicine to prevent TB disease. People with TB disease must complete treatment to cure the disease. TB drugs are free when a doctor orders them from Public Health. TB is preventable, treatable and curable!

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