

Tuberculosis FAQ

What is Tuberculosis (TB)?

Tuberculosis is a disease caused by bacteria (germs). The bacteria can attack any part of the body but most commonly the lungs.

How is TB spread?

TB is spread from one person to another through the air. When a person with untreated lung or throat TB coughs, speaks or sneezes, the bacteria are expelled into the air. People nearby may breathe in these bacteria and become infected. It is not possible to catch TB from drinking glasses, cutlery, crockery, sheets, clothes or the telephone.

What is TB Infection?

If people breathe in the TB bacteria and become infected, in most cases the body is able to fight the bacteria to stop them growing. In some people the bacteria can remain asleep in the body and become active later. Most people who are infected with TB never develop TB disease. A tuberculin skin test is the preferred test to show if a person has been infected by TB bacteria.

Who should be tested?

Testing for TB infection is recommended for people who have had contact with someone who has active TB.

If I have TB infection am I infectious?

No. You can only become infectious if the bacteria become active and disease grows in the lungs.

What is TB disease?

TB disease occurs when TB bacteria become active. The active bacteria begin to grow and start to cause damage to the lungs or other parts of the body. Symptoms of TB depend on where in the body the TB bacteria are growing.

TB in the lungs may cause:

- > A bad cough that lasts longer than 2 weeks
- > Pain in the chest
- > Coughing up blood or phlegm

Other symptoms of TB disease maybe:

- > Weakness or fatigue
- > Weight loss
- > No appetite
- > Chills
- > Fever
- > Sweating at night

What are the tests for TB disease?

- > A chest X-ray shows if TB bacteria have affected the lungs
- > A sputum test shows if TB bacteria are present in the lungs

Can TB be cured?

TB can almost always be cured if medicine is taken as directed by your doctor and the course completed.

Is TB contact a risk for pregnant women?

There is no additional risk for pregnant women. The tuberculin skin test is safe to use in pregnant women.

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For more information

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