

Fact Sheet

Tuberculosis (TB)

What is TB?

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by germs that are spread from person to person through the air. TB usually affects the lungs, but it can also affect other parts of the body, such as the brain, the kidneys, or the spine. TB can be treated and cured.

I was notified that I was in contact with someone who has TB, what should I do?

You should be tested to see if you have been infected. If you have been in contact with the TB germ, you may develop latent TB infection (sometimes called sleeping TB). You can be treated to prevent latent TB infection from becoming active TB disease.

What is the difference between latent TB infection and active TB disease?

If you have latent TB infection it means that the germ is not growing in your body, it is not making you sick and you cannot spread it to others.

If you have active TB disease, it means the germs are growing in your body. This will make you feel sick and you may be spreading it to others.

How is TB spread?

TB is spread when people spend time breathing the same air with someone who has active TB disease in their lungs. The TB germs must be breathed in from the air; you cannot get TB from touching things like doorknobs or sharing someone's drinking glass, or clothes. You cannot get TB by shaking hands with someone who has it. TB is most often spread to close friends and family members of people who have active TB disease and do not know they have it. You cannot get TB from someone who has latent TB infection.

What are the symptoms of TB?

The common symptoms of TB are:

- cough that lasts for more than 3 weeks
- night sweats
- fever
- weight loss
- coughing up blood
- feeling unusually tired

Remember – if you or someone you care about is having these symptoms, THINK TB and get tested! You can get tested for TB at your local health center.

How can you be tested for TB and what can the TB test tell me?

The TB skin test is a tiny needle in your forearm. Many people have had a TB skin test before. The skin test must be checked by a nurse 48-72 hours [2-3 days] after it is given, to find out the results. A positive TB skin test means you may have been in contact with someone who has active TB disease. It does NOT mean you can spread TB to others. You will need more tests such as a chest x-ray and spitting into a cup to make sure you do not have active TB disease.

Can TB be cured?

Yes. Active TB disease can be cured with medication. These medications can also prevent latent TB from turning into active disease. Each dose of medication is given by a healthcare worker in your home community.