What is TB?

“TB” is short for a disease called tuberculosis. TB is spread through the air from one person to another. TB germs are passed through the air when someone who is sick with TB disease of the lungs or throat coughs, speaks, laughs, sings, or sneezes. Anyone near the sick person with TB disease can breathe TB germs into their lungs.

TB germs can live in your body without making you sick. This is called latent TB infection. This means you have only inactive (sleeping) TB germs in your body. The inactive germs cannot be passed on to anyone else. However, if these germs wake up or become active in your body and multiply, you will get sick with TB disease.

When TB germs are active (multiplying in your body), this is called TB disease. These germs usually attack the lungs. They can also attack other parts of the body, such as, the kidneys, brain, or spine. TB disease will make you sick. People with TB disease may spread the germs to people they spend time with every day.

How do I know if I have been infected with TB germs?

If you have been around someone who has TB disease, you should go to your doctor or your local health department for tests.

There are two tests that can be used to help detect TB infection: a TB skin test or TB blood test. The skin test is used most often. A small needle is used to put some testing material, called tuberculin, under the skin. In 2-3 days, you return to the health care worker who will check to see if there is a reaction to the test. In some cases, a TB blood test is used to test for TB infection. This blood test measures how a person’s immune system reacts to the germs that cause TB.

To tell if someone has TB disease, other tests such as chest x-ray and a sample of sputum (phlegm that is coughed up from deep in the lungs) may be needed.
What should I do if I have TB?

If you have latent TB infection, you may need medicine to prevent getting TB disease later. One or more drugs are used to treat latent TB infection. It is important that you take your medicine exactly as your doctor or health care worker tells you.

TB disease can also be treated by taking medicine. If you have TB disease, it is very important that you finish the medicine, and take the drugs exactly as you are told. If you stop taking the drugs too soon, you can become sick again. If you do not take the drugs correctly, the germs that are still alive may become difficult to treat with those drugs. If you have TB disease, it takes six months and possibly as long as one year to kill all the TB germs.

Remember, you will always have TB germs in your body unless you kill them with the right medicine.

People who are more likely to get sick from TB disease include:

- those with HIV infection (the virus that causes AIDS);
- those who have been recently infected with TB (in the last two years);
- those who inject illegal drugs;
- babies and young children;
- elderly people;
- those who were not treated correctly for TB in the past; and
- those with certain medical conditions such as diabetes, certain types of cancer, and being underweight.

These people have conditions that make the body weaker, so it is difficult for them to fight TB germs.

Protect your family and friends from TB — take ALL your TB drugs!

http://www.cdc.gov/tb
What is tuberculosis (TB)?

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by bacteria called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* 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. Not everyone infected with TB bacteria becomes sick. As a result, two TB-related conditions exist: latent TB infection and TB disease.

What is latent TB infection?

Persons with latent TB infection (LTBI) do not feel sick and do not have any symptoms, but usually have a positive reaction to the tuberculin skin test or TB blood test. They are infected with TB bacteria, but do not have TB disease. Persons with LTBI are not infectious and cannot spread TB infection to others.

What is TB disease?

In some people, TB bacteria overcome the defenses of the immune system and begin to multiply, resulting in the progression from latent TB infection to TB disease. Some people develop TB disease soon after infection, while others never develop TB disease or develop it later in life when their immune system becomes weak. Persons with TB disease usually have symptoms, are considered infectious, and may spread TB bacteria to others.

What are the symptoms of TB?

The general symptoms of TB disease include feelings of sickness or weakness, weight loss, fever, and night sweats. The symptoms of TB disease of the lungs may also include coughing, chest pain, and the coughing up of blood. Symptoms of TB disease in other parts of the body depend on the area affected.

### Comparison of Latent TB Infection and TB Disease

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A person with latent TB infection (LTBI)</th>
<th>A person with TB disease</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Usually has a TB skin test or blood test result indicating TB infection</td>
<td>Usually has a TB skin test or blood test result indicating TB infection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a normal chest x-ray and a negative sputum test</td>
<td>May have an abnormal chest x-ray, or positive sputum smear or culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has TB bacteria in his/her body that are alive, but inactive</td>
<td>Has active TB bacteria in his/her body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not feel sick</td>
<td>Usually feels sick and may have symptoms such as coughing, fever, and weight loss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot spread TB bacteria to others</td>
<td>May spread TB bacteria to others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs treatment for latent TB infection to prevent TB disease</td>
<td>Needs treatment for TB disease</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How is TB spread?

TB bacteria are released into the air when a person with TB disease of the lungs or throat coughs, sneezes, speaks, or sings. These bacteria can stay in the air for several hours, depending on the environment. Persons who breathe in the air containing these TB bacteria can become infected; this is called latent TB infection. A person with latent TB infection cannot spread TB to others.
Persons with TB disease are most likely to spread the bacteria to other people they spend time with every day, such as family members or coworkers. Anyone who has been around someone who has TB disease should go to the doctor or local health department for TB tests.

TB is not spread through eating utensils, countertops, chairs, doorknobs, or other surfaces where a TB patient has been.

**What should I do if an employee reports having a positive TB test or that he or she has been in contact with someone who has TB?**

It is important to remember that only a person with TB disease can transmit TB bacteria to others. If an individual has been around someone with TB disease, he or she can get TB infection. However, not everyone infected with TB germs becomes sick. A person with latent TB infection cannot spread germs to other people, but can develop TB disease in the future.

For additional information, contact your local or state TB control program. They can advise you about what should be done.

**What will happen after I contact my local or state TB control program for assistance?**

The TB control program will determine if the employee has latent TB infection or TB disease. Since people with latent TB infection cannot spread TB to others, nothing further will need to be done in the workplace. However, if the employee has TB disease, the TB control program may start a contact investigation. The investigation will help them find out how the employee may have been exposed to TB and to determine who else might be at risk.

During the investigation, the health department will ask the employee about his or her job, such as the work hours, working conditions, and people who work closely with him or her. The TB control program may set up an appointment to talk with you and to tour your workplace. They may also want to talk to people who regularly visit your workplace. Throughout the investigation, they will work with you to make sure that the employee's identity is kept confidential.

**Additional Information**


