

TUBERCULOSIS

PREVENTION BETTER THAN CURE

What is Tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease that can cause serious illness and damage a person's lungs or other parts of the body. People of all ages, all nationalities and all incomes can get tuberculosis. In almost all instances, with modern medicine **tuberculosis can be cured.**

How is TB spread?

TB spreads when individuals come in very close, day-to-day, contact with people who have active untreated TB germs. The germs spread through air; borne from lungs or throat during cough, sneeze or while speaking. That's why most people get infected from someone they spend a lot of time with, like a family member, friend or close co-worker. You're not likely to get TB from someone coughing in the subway or at a restaurant. However dishes, drinking glasses, sheets or clothing, do not spread it.

...TB germs spread through the air

What does having "TB infection" mean?

Persons are said to be "TB Infected" if they carry TB germs in their body. The defense system of the body controls the germs by building a wall around them and making them inactive. The germs can stay alive in this state for years. While in inactive state they do not cause any damage they can't spread to other people. In such cases the infected individuals are not aware of the infection and are not sick. He/she probably won't even know of the infection. Millions of people have TB infection. For most, the germs will always remain inactive.

Inactive TB germs can't hurt you now...

What is TB disease?

Tuberculosis is a disease that can cause serious illness by active TB germs. An infected body with weak defenses can get TB disease shortly after the germs enter the body. Even after remaining dormant for many years inactive TB germs can

become active when the defenses of the body are weakened with age, a serious illness, drug or alcohol abuse, or HIV infection. These weaknesses in the defense system of the body enable the germs to become active. They break out of the walls, multiply and cause damage to the lungs and other parts of the body. Such people can become seriously ill or even die if not treated medically or if treatment and medications are ignored. However with proper care and treatment TB can be cured.

... **when body defenses are weakened, inactive TB germs become active and break out**

What is Drug Resistant TB?

When, TB germs become "resistant" to the medications too often prescribed by the doctors, it is called Drug Resistant TB. This happens when a patient with active TB stops taking medicines too soon or when prescribed with wrong TB medicines. This kind of TB is treated with combinations of TB medicines and takes longer to cure. A person with untreated drug resistant TB of the lungs or throat can transmit the "resistant" germs.

What are the signs of TB?

Lungs are the most common target for TB. However other parts of the body are also susceptible to attack. TB Infected people may show some or all of the following symptoms:

- Continuous cough (with blood streaked sputum, in advance cases)
- Fever
- Weight loss
- Night sweats
- Constant tiredness
- Loss of appetite

Active TB cases may have only mild symptoms and could be spreading germs without knowing of their TB infection.

Who should get tested for TB?

- People with TB symptoms.
- People in close day-to-day contact with person(s) infected with TB disease (this could be a family member, friend or co-worker.)
- People with lowered immunity due to HIV infection, or certain medical conditions.

- Anyone who thinks he/she has been exposed to a condition where they could have contracted TB or become a carrier.

Can TB patients infect other people?

Although a doctor decides if the patient is contagious after medical tests most patients with TB disease will stop spreading germs after a week or two of taking proper and effective medications, . As long as TB patients continue to take their medicines with care they can live at home and continue their normal activities.

How can we fight TB?

The best way to fight TB is to make sure that people who need medicine take it regularly. They include:

- People who are sick with TB. These people have active germs that can infect others. The only way people with TB disease get well is to take medicine as directed.
- People who are infected but are not sick. These people have inactive germs that are "walled off". These people may not be sick now, but the TB germs can become active later on. Taking preventive medicine everyday, as prescribed by the doctor, is the best way to get rid of TB germs and prevent illness. In some instances, preventive medicine may not be prescribed to some infected people because of their age or certain medical conditions.
- People who are in close contact with infectious TB cases, regardless of age. These people should take medicine to prevent TB as directed by the doctor.

Can TB Be Cured?

Yes. With great advancement in modern medicine it has become possible to treat almost all instances of Tuberculosis successfully. The medicines have to be taken as directed by the doctor daily for a period of six months. People infected with HIV have to take their medicines for a longer period of time. The drug resistant form of TB takes longer to control and cure, as the germs become immune to medicines. Laboratory test conducted by your doctor will be able to check for drug resistance, if any. TB medicines are safe, but can cause side effects sometimes. Any changes in health or appearance after taking medicines should be reported to the doctor or nurse. Most people do not have any problems with TB medicines

What are some changes that I should watch out for?

- Yellowish skin
- Dark urine
- Vomiting
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Changes in eyesight
- Unexplained fever
- Unexplained fatigue
- Stomach cramps

Why do I have to take pills for so long?

It takes a long time to remove TB infection completely as the TB germs are strong. Hence, proper medication has to be continued with care, as directed by the doctor, to remove all the TB germs completely from the body.

I feel better! Why should I keep taking pills?

Proper dosage of the medicine has to be continued even after one starts to feel better. TB germs are strong and take longer time to be removed completely. Thus there could be still many active TB germs in the body, which could multiply and make you sick again. Drug resistant TB can develop when a person with TB stops taking medicine too soon. A person with untreated drug resistant TB of the lungs or throat can transmit the drug resistant germs.

Taking your medicine regularly will cure you.

Why do I need regular clinic or doctor visits?

Regular visits to your doctor will ensure that :

1. The medicines are working
2. The medicines are not giving you any side effects
3. You are not spreading germs by checking your sputum.
4. You get your medicines.

If you stop too soon you can get sick again

How can I keep TB from spreading?

- If you take your medicine as directed, medicines will stop you from spreading the germs within a few weeks. But remember,

YOU ARE NOT YET CURED. The most important thing is to continue taking your pills as prescribed and continue taking them until the doctor says you can stop.

- Always cover your mouth when you cough.

- Tell all the people who you spend a lot of time with, to get a medical check. This check is especially important for young children and for people who have HIV infection because they can become sick from TB in a short time.

Can I live as I always did?

If proper hygiene, healthy food, plenty of fresh air and most important of all prescribed medicines are continued patients can live their normal lives. During the first few weeks after treatment begins, the doctor may restrict the patient's contacts and activities until tests confirms that he/she no longer contagious.

Things to Remember

1. TB is a dangerous but curable disease
2. If you have symptoms contact your health worker/nurse/doctor.
3. Tests confirm the seriousness of the infection. Tests will safe guard your family and close contacts from getting infected.
4. If you are confirmed TB positive, get your family and close contacts also tested.
5. Healthy food, proper hygiene and clean air helps in treatment but only medicines can cure TB.
6. Always continue the prescribed medicines with proper care as directed by the doctor.
7. Feeling better does not confirm complete recovery. TB germs are strong and take a long time to be removed completely. Timely visit to the doctor and continuation of the medicines are important.
8. On stopping medications too soon drug resistant TB, may develop. This takes an even longer time to cure.
9. Any medicine related side effects are to be reported to the doctor.
10. Only complete treatment, clinical tests and your doctor can help cure TB, and help you lead a normal healthy life.

TUBERCULOSIS

Some facts you need to know

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