



QUESTIONS QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ANSWERS

What is Tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis (say: too-ber-ku-lo-sis) is called TB for short. It is a disease that most often attacks the lungs, but it can attack other parts of the body.

How Do You Get TB?

The TB germ spreads from person to person by air. A person with **TB disease** can send the germ into the air by:

- a cough or sneeze
- singing or talking

It is not easy to get TB. To catch it, a person must be in close contact for a long time with someone who has TB disease. TB commonly spreads among:

- family
- close friends
- co-workers
- roommates

There are rare cases of people catching TB germs on airplanes.

Being Infected with TB Germs and Having TB Disease

There is a difference between **being infected** with TB germs and **having TB disease**. It is important to know the difference.

A person **infected** with TB has the germs in the body but is not sick. That person's body is strong enough to protect it from the germs. That person carries the germs but does not spread them.

The person who has TB **disease** is sick. This person can spread the disease to other people.

Only a doctor can tell the difference. TB is a serious disease. It is important to be checked if you:

- show signs of the disease
- have been in close contact with someone who has the disease

Signs of TB

A person with TB **infection** has no signs. A person with TB **disease** may have some, all or none of the following signs:

- a cough that will not go away
- feeling tired all the time
- not wanting to eat
- fever
- coughing up blood
- night sweats

These signs can show up with other lung diseases. It is important to see a doctor so you can get the right treatment.

A person with TB disease may feel perfectly healthy. Or, that person may just have a cough from time to time. See a doctor if you think you have been in contact with someone who has TB disease.

How TB Develops

There are two ways TB develops in a person.

1. A person may be infected with the TB germ for years and be healthy. If that person's health becomes poor, the disease may develop. A change from good to poor health may be due to:
 - getting a disease such as AIDS or diabetes
 - drug or alcohol abuse
 - lack of health care

- the effects of homelessness, such as:
 - being poorly fed
 - spending lots of time outside in bad weather
- 2. Sometimes when a person first breathes in the TB germs the body cannot protect itself against the disease. The germs then develop into TB disease in weeks.

Who is at Risk for TB Disease?

About 10 million Americans are infected with TB germs. Only about 10% of these people will develop TB disease. The other 90% will never get sick from TB germs or spread them.

Anyone can get TB at any age. The groups who are at high risk are those who:

- have AIDS
- are in close contact with those who have **TB disease**
- have health problems that make the body too weak to fight off the disease, including people:
 - with diabetes
 - with dust disease (silicosis)
 - who must take drugs that weaken their ability to fight off germs
- are elderly
- come from countries with high TB rates
- are Asian, Black or Latino
- work or live in places like
 - nursing homes
 - prisons
 - hospitals that treat high risk patients
- are not well fed
- are alcoholics
- are IV drug users

Tests for TB

A skin test is most often used to find TB. This is how it is done:

- The doctor uses a needle to inject a small amount of material under the top layer of skin. This is most often done on the arm.
- Two to three days later the doctor checks the arm for a bump.

Test Results

Negative Results:

- No bump comes up. It may mean you do not have the germ.
- No bump comes up, but you have some signs of TB. It may mean:
 - You have not had the germ long enough for it to show up.
 - Your body's ability to fight off the germ is not working well.
- In these cases your doctor will order an X-ray or a mucus test. Mucus is coughed up from the lungs.

Significant Results:

- A bump shows up. It is measured. If the bump is a certain size it is a sign the person is infected with the TB germs. This does not mean the person has TB disease. The doctor will order X-rays or a mucus test to find out if the person has the disease.

Who Should Get a Skin Test?

Some people must get skin tests because of their jobs. This is done so they do not pass on the disease. These jobs include those in:

- hospitals, nursing homes
- day care centers, schools
- food service
- prisons

You should get a TB test if you:

- have been in close contact with someone who has TB disease
- have the signs of TB (listed before)
- are HIV positive
- have never been tested before
- don't know the results of your last test

If you are not sure, ask your doctor if you should be tested.

Treatments for TB

The kind of treatment a person gets depends on whether:

- the person is only infected with the TB germ, or

- the person has the TB disease

A person **infected** with TB germs may get treatment to prevent the disease. TB is treated with drugs. This treatment kills germs that are not doing any damage right now but may break out later. The person takes a daily dose of TB drugs for six, nine or 12 months. The person needs to get checkups during this time.

If tests show a person has TB **disease** the person:

- may stay in a hospital for a short time
- will take TB drugs for about 9 months

Within a few weeks of taking the drugs the person will:

- feel better
- go back to normal activity
- not infect others

*It is important to take the correct daily dose of drugs for the full length of time.

Multi-drug Resistant TB (MDR TB for Short)

People with TB disease will get sick again if they:

- stop taking the TB drugs too soon
- do not take the correct daily dose

The germs still living in the body after a person has been on TB drugs for awhile are strong. They are drug-resistant germs. When a person stops taking the drugs too soon the drug-resistant germs multiply. Soon the person has a kind of TB called multi-drug resistant TB. **This kind of TB is dangerous.** It is hard to treat. It can be passed on to others.

Some people have a hard time remembering to take their TB drugs. A program called Directly Observed Therapy (DOT for short) can help them. This means that someone gives the person the drug and watches him take it. The people giving out the drugs may be family, health care workers or volunteers.

To Get Well, a Person Must:

- take the TB drugs as ordered by the doctor
- get regular checkups to see how treatment is going
- tell the doctor about any side effects they may have from the drugs

How can I find a Doctor?

St. Vincent Charity Hospital has doctors who have special training in the treatment of tuberculosis. To contact one of our doctors call the:

Physician Referral Line at 1-800-223-8662

Visit our Web site at www.stvincentcharity.com

Our doctors serve with a deep respect for all. Their goal is to give the best care and education whether or not a person can pay.

St. Vincent Charity Hospital

2351 E. 22nd Street

Cleveland, Ohio 44115

216-861-6200

TTY: Ohio Relay 1-800-750-0750

St. Luke's Health Care Center

11201 Shaker Boulevard

Cleveland, Ohio 44104

216-721-6900

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