

INFORMATION ABOUT TUBERCULOSIS

ENGLISH



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1. What is tuberculosis?

- Tuberculosis is an infectious disease caused by a germ called the *tubercle bacillus*.
- Anyone can be infected with the TB germ.
- The TB germ enters the body as you breathe and usually settles in the lungs. From there it can spread to other parts of the body.
- When you are first infected with the TB germ, you do not usually get sick, but the germ remains in your body in an inactive state.
- The germ can become active at any time in your life. Not all people with inactive infection will get active TB. Most often this happens when you are older, or if you get another disease that lowers your ability to fight infections.
- When the germ becomes active, it causes the disease known as tuberculosis or TB.
- There is medicine to give to people who have inactive infection to prevent the disease from becoming active.

2. How is TB spread?

- When a person with active TB breathes out, for example by coughing, sneezing or talking, the TB germs go from their lungs into the air.
- People become infected by breathing in the air that is carrying the TB germ.
- Only people who have the active form of TB of the lungs can spread the infection. People who have inactive infection cannot pass TB to another person.
- TB is most often spread to people who spend a lot of time with a person with active TB, especially those who live in the same house.

3. How do you know if you have been infected?

- There is a test called the TB skin test that will show if you have been infected.
- The skin test does not show when you were infected or if the germ is inactive or active.

4. What if the skin test shows infection?

- If the skin test shows that the germ is in your body, the doctor will order tests to see if the germ is active or inactive.
- A chest X-ray will show if there is any damage to your lungs.
- The doctor may test a sample of the fluid that comes from your lungs after you cough to see if the germs are active in your lungs.
- If you are infected, any medications that you need to take will be provided at no cost.
- A person's immigration status is not changed because of infection with the TB germ.

5. How is inactive infection treated?

- If you have an infection that is inactive, the doctor may prescribe medication to get rid of the germs from your body and to prevent the germs from causing TB in the future.
- INH (isoniazid) is the usual medication given for inactive infections.
- A person with inactive infection needs to take INH for as long as their doctor tells them, which can be many months.

6. What are the symptoms of TB disease?

- The symptoms of active tuberculosis are:
 - A cough that lasts two weeks or more, especially if fluid or blood comes from the lungs when you cough
 - Fever
 - Weight loss
 - Night sweats
 - Loss of appetite
- These symptoms may not appear until disease has already caused damage.
- Many of these symptoms can be confused with other illnesses.

7. What happens if someone has active TB?

- People with active TB of the lungs may need to go into the hospital for a few weeks.
- Once a person with active TB has taken medicine for a few weeks, the germ cannot be passed to others any more. The person can usually return to work, school and other activities.
- A person with active TB usually feels better after taking medicine for a few weeks. It is very important to continue to take medications for as long as the doctor says, even if you do not feel sick. Otherwise, the TB disease may not be cured and can come back again.

8. What are the medications used to treat TB?

- More than one prescription drug is needed to kill the active TB germ. The usual drugs are isoniazid (INH) and rifampin (RMP).
- These medications need to be taken exactly as your doctor says, usually for six to nine months.
- Tell your doctor about any other medications you may be taking.
- Tell you doctor if you are pregnant or if you become pregnant during treatment.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist to explain about the side effects that may result from taking the TB drugs.

9. Important:

- Whether drugs are prescribed for TB infection or disease, follow these two rules:
- Take drugs exactly as told
- Take all medication that you are prescribed even if you are feeling better

10. Is there a new strain of TB, which is more dangerous?

- Sometimes the TB germ becomes resistant to two of the best drugs, isoniazid (INH) and rifampin (RMP).
- Drug resistant tuberculosis germs are created when patients do not take their medications as prescribed by the doctor.
- This form of TB is very serious because it cannot be treated with the usual TB medications.
- People infected with drug resistant TB need specialized medical care.

11. What are the names of the most common medications for TB?

| <i>Chemical name</i> | <i>Brand name</i> |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Isoniazid (INH) | Isotamine |
| Rifampin | Rifadin |
| Rifampicin | Rimactane, Rofact |
| Ethambutol | Myambutol, Etibi |
| Pyrazinamide | Tebrazid |

12. What are the possible side effects of TB medications?

- There are not many serious side effects to the drugs for TB and not many people get them.
- If you are taking rifampicin, your urine, saliva or tears may look orange. This is a normal reaction to the drug. It may cause your contact lenses to become permanently stained, so avoid wearing them.
- Rifampicin reduces the effectiveness of birth-control pills. If you are using the pill, other contraceptives such as condoms should also be used.
- Your doctor may prescribe vitamin B6 to reduce the side effects of taking isoniazid.

13. Contact your doctor if you have any of the following reactions:

- Skin redness
- Itching
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Loss of appetite
- Pains in the stomach
- Stomach cramps
- Loss of energy, feeling tired
- Pain in joints or muscles
- Changes in how you see colours, red and green
- Numbness or painful tingling in hands or legs