

# Tuberculosis (TB) Facts

## You Can Prevent TB

### 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.



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## 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!**

