



Fact Sheet **Tuberculosis (TB)**

What is tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by a bacteria which is spread from person to person through the air. It usually affects the lungs but may also affect other parts of the body such as bone, kidneys or other organs.

How does a person become infected with tuberculosis?

TB germs spread through the air when someone with TB of the lungs or throat coughs, sneezes, speaks or sings. These TB germs can stay in the air for several hours and others can become infected if they breathe in the TB germs.

What is latent or inactive TB infection?

When a person breathes in the TB germs, the person often has the germs in their body but do not become ill with active TB. These people do not have TB symptoms and are not contagious to other people. Their skin test or tuberculin test will be positive, showing that TB germs have entered their body.

How can you prevent getting TB once you have breathed in the germs?

A person who is well nourished is less likely to get TB once they have been exposed to the bacteria. If a person is exposed to TB, a skin test can be done to show if that person has breathed in the TB germs. Medications can be given to prevent TB from developing.

What is active TB infection or TB disease?

TB disease results when a person who has been exposed to the TB bacteria becomes ill from the bacteria. The TB may infect the lung(s), an organ or in rare instances it may be spread to several sites in the body. People with TB disease are sick from the germs which are multiplying and destroying tissue in their body.

What are the symptoms of TB?

A person with TB feels ill or weak, loses weight and has a fever and/or night sweats. TB of the lung causes coughing, chest pain and/or coughing up blood. TB in other parts of the body causes different symptoms depending upon the organ affected.

When is an infected person contagious?

If a person has active TB, the person is contagious when coughing up TB bacteria from the lungs or larynx/throat. After being on the recommended treatment for 10 to 21 days, the person with active TB is usually not contagious, but they must complete the medication as ordered to prevent recurrence.

How is tuberculosis treated?

TB is treated by taking antibiotic drugs for six to 12 months.