

## Information about Tuberculosis (TB)

### *What is TB?*

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by germs that are spread from person to person through the air. TB usually affects the lungs, but it can also affect other parts of the body, such as the brain, the kidneys, or the spine. A person with TB can die if they do not get treatment.

### *What are the symptoms of TB?*

The general symptoms of TB disease include:

- feelings of sickness or weakness
- weight loss
- fever
- night sweats

The symptoms of TB disease of the lungs also include:

- Coughing (sometimes with blood)
- Chest pain

### *How is TB spread?*

TB germs are put into the air when a person with TB disease of the lungs or throat coughs, sneezes, speaks, or sings. These germs can stay in the air for several hours, depending on the environment. Persons who breathe in the air containing these TB germs can become infected; this is called latent TB infection.

### *What is the difference between Latent TB and TB Disease?*

<b>A Person with Latent TB Infection</b>	<b>A Person with TB Disease</b>
Has no symptoms	Has symptoms that may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- a bad cough that lasts 3 weeks or longer</li><li>- pain in the chest</li><li>- coughing up blood or sputum</li><li>- weakness or fatigue</li><li>- weight loss</li><li>- no appetite</li><li>- chills</li><li>- fever</li><li>- sweating at night</li></ul>
Does not feel sick	Usually feels sick
Cannot spread TB bacteria to others	May spread TB bacteria to others
Usually has a skin test or blood test result indicating TB infection	Usually has a skin test or blood test result indicating TB infection
Has a normal chest x-ray and a negative sputum smear	May have an abnormal chest x-ray, or positive sputum smear or culture
Needs treatment for latent TB infection to prevent active TB disease	Needs treatment to treat active TB disease

## *What Should I Do If I Have Spent Time with Someone with Latent TB Infection?*

A person with latent TB infection cannot spread germs to other people. You do not need to be tested if you have spent time with someone with latent TB infection. However, if you have spent time with someone with TB disease or someone with symptoms of TB, you should be tested.

## *What Should I Do if I Have Been Exposed to Someone with TB Disease?*

People with TB disease are most likely to spread the germs to people they spend time with every day, such as family members or coworkers. If you have been around someone who has TB disease, you should get a TB skin test.

## *What is a TB skin test?*

A TB skin test is performed by injecting a small amount of fluid (called tuberculin) into the skin in the lower part of the arm. A person given the tuberculin skin test must return to have a trained health care worker look for a reaction on the arm.

## *What does a positive TB skin test mean?*

A positive TB skin test only tells that a person has been infected with TB germs. It does not tell whether or not the person has progressed to TB disease. Other tests, such as a chest x-ray and a sample of sputum, are needed to see whether the person has TB disease.

## *What if I have been vaccinated with BCG?*

[BCG](#) is a vaccine for TB. If you were vaccinated with BCG, you may have a positive reaction to a TB skin test. This reaction may be due to the BCG vaccine itself or due to infection with the TB bacteria. Special TB blood tests are available that are not affected by prior BCG vaccination and are less likely to give a false-positive result.

## **Resources**

[Tuberculosis: General Information Fact Sheet](#)

## **Tobacco and TB**

Think smoking or even second-hand smoke has nothing to do with TB? Think again! Up to 20% of all TB deaths could be avoided if patients were not smokers. Recent studies have found links between smoking and many aspects of tuberculosis:

- Smoking is associated with death from tuberculosis.
- Passive smoking is associated with developing tuberculosis disease.
- Treatment for TB is less effective for people who continue to smoke or continue to be exposed to secondhand smoke.
- Restarting smoking after treatment poses the risk of re-infection and disease. It is much more difficult and takes much longer to treat this kind of TB.