

Tuberculosis Fact Sheet

What is Tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis (TB) is usually caused by a bacterium called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*.

How is TB spread?

Tuberculosis (TB) is spread from person to person through the air. TB usually affects the lungs, but can also affect other parts of the body, such as the brain, the kidney, lymph nodes, or the spine. TB bacteria are spread through the air when a person with active TB disease of the lung coughs, sneezes, laughs, or sings. TB can be cured if treated properly.

What are the symptoms of TB?

Feeling generally weak or sick, having an unexplained rapid weight loss (over a few weeks or months), fever, and/ or night sweats. Symptoms of active TB disease of the lungs may include cough, chest pain, or coughing up blood. Other TB symptoms depend on the particular part of the body that is affected.

People with active TB disease are sick from bacteria that are active in their body and usually have one or more symptoms of TB. These people are often able to give the infection to others. Medications can cure active TB disease; usually several medications called antibiotics are required, and must be taken for several months.

Who does TB affect?

TB can affect anyone of any age, but some people are more at risk than others, including:

- Infants, small children and the elderly
- Persons who share the same breathing space with someone who has active TB disease
- Persons who spend extended time in countries where large numbers of people have active TB disease
- Alcoholics and injection drug users
- Persons with certain medical conditions such as diabetes, kidney failure, and those with weakened immune systems such as HIV/ AIDS or persons undergoing certain cancer treatments

How will I know if I have TB?

- You can get a TB test at your provider's office; some local health departments offer testing as well. A negative test usually means there is no TB infection. However, in some circumstances it is necessary to perform a second test 8-10 week after your first test.
- A positive skin test reaction usually means a person has been infected with TB, but cannot differentiate between latent TB infection or active TB disease. Other tests, such as a chest x-ray and sputum samples, are needed to see if a person has active TB disease.
- A pregnant woman can have a TB test at any time during her pregnancy. If a follow-up chest x-ray is needed, she should be shielded appropriately.

What if I have been vaccinated with Bacille Calmette-Guerin (BCG)?

- Persons who have received the BCG vaccine are not exempt from getting either a TB skin test or blood test.

Latent TB Infection is different from active disease.

People with latent TB infection (no active disease) have the bacteria that can cause active TB disease in their body. They are not sick because the TB bacteria are inactive. They cannot spread TB to others. Medications can be taken to prevent development of active TB disease in the future

What if I am diagnosed with TB?

- Get all of the diagnostic tests required by your doctor.
- Stay at home until your doctor or TB case manager tells you it is okay to return to work or school. Do not have visitors (especially infants, small children, or anyone who is immune compromised) until your doctor or the health department says it is okay.
- Keep all your medical appointments.
- Take all your TB medications as prescribed. In Maryland, the local health department works with you to manage your care. The local health department will provide the correct antibiotics and make sure they are taken correctly. Length of treatment varies.
- The antibiotics used to treat TB disease are powerful and can affect other medications you are taking. Tell your doctor about all medications you take, including “over-the-counter” medications.
- If you have any side effects from the TB medications stop taking them immediately and contact your doctor or health department.

Directly Observed Therapy:

- Persons with active TB disease in Maryland are treated by Directly Observed Therapy, also known as DOT. DOT means that a health department nurse or outreach worker will help you take every dose of your TB medications until you are finished treatment.
- DOT can be provided at home, at school or work, or at the local health department. DOT also allows the nurse to make sure you are not having any side effects from the medications.
- Your doctor will arrange for the local health department to provide DOT for you or your family member. All antibiotics given DOT are provided at no cost to the patient.