

Tuberculosis Infection

What You Should Know

What is Tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis is a bacterial infection found most often in the lungs, but which can spread to other parts of the body. Untreated, it can destroy lung tissue and make breathing difficult or impossible. TB is a public health concern because it can spread through the air when a person with active TB disease coughs or sneezes.

What is active TB?

Exposure to active TB does not always result in illness, but it may result in TB infection. In TB infection the bacteria is present but remains dormant and causes no symptoms in an otherwise healthy person. Over time, TB infection can develop into active TB disease, particularly if the immune system weakens through illness, age or other cause. Active TB causes illness in the person who has it and is contagious to others. Active TB requires a course of treatment as soon as possible.

TB infection is not contagious, but it's still important to identify and treat TB infection before it can become active TB disease.

What are the symptoms of active TB?

Symptoms of active TB disease are persistent coughing lasting two or more weeks, chest pains, difficulty breathing, chills, fever, coughing up blood, night sweats, feeling tired, and weight loss.

Can I be infected from someone with active TB?

TB infection usually requires extensive direct contact with a contagious person who has active TB disease. Because tuberculosis is a respiratory infection, it typically spreads when a person inhales airborne bacteria over an extended period of time. TB is not spread by casual contact such as shaking someone's hand, sharing food or drink, touching bed linens or a toilet seat, sharing toothbrushes, or kissing.

How likely am I to be infected from exposure to active TB?

TB is rarely spread to persons who spend brief amounts of time together. TB infection can be cured and prevented from progressing to active disease if identified and treated.

What happens if I test positive for TB infection?

TB infection does not cause illness and has no symptoms. Persons with TB infection cannot spread the disease to others. A skin test or blood test can detect the presence of the TB infection. If TB infection is detected, a course of treatment is usually recommended to prevent active TB disease in the future.



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