



What is tuberculosis (TB)?

TB is an infection or disease caused by a germ that you breathe into your lungs. There are two forms of TB: TB infection and TB disease.

What is TB infection?

TB infection means you have a small number of TB germs living in your body, but they are not harming you - your immune system is keeping them from causing problems. You feel fine, you are not sick and you cannot give TB germs to anyone. If you have TB infection and your immune system becomes weak, your TB infection can develop into TB disease. TB infection is also called latent TB infection (LTBI).

What is TB disease?

TB disease means you have a large number of TB germs living in your body and the germs are causing harm. Usually you feel sick, and you often can spread TB germs to others. TB disease can be found in any part of your body but it usually affects your lungs. The most common symptoms of TB disease are coughing, fever, loss of appetite, weight loss, weakness, night sweats and feeling very tired.

How is TB spread?

TB germs are spread to others when someone who is sick with TB disease of the lungs coughs or sneezes sending TB germs into the air. People who are living, working or spending a lot of time with this person can breathe in the TB germs and get infected.

Usually, prolonged close contact with someone with infectious TB must occur before someone becomes infected.

What is the difference between latent TB infection (LTBI) and TB disease?

People with LTBI (without disease) have TB germs in their body but are not sick because the germs are not active. They cannot spread the germ to others. However, these people may develop TB disease in the future, if the TB germs become active. People with TB disease usually have one or more of the symptoms of TB and are sick because the TB germs are active and multiplying in their body. People with TB disease in their lungs can spread TB germs to others.

How can I tell if I have TB?

A TB skin test (mantoux or PPD) is given to detect LTBI. If the skin test is positive, a chest x-ray and other exams will be done to make sure you do not have TB disease. The test is available at the health department or from a doctor's office.

Can TB infection be treated?

Yes. If you have TB infection, you may be given medicine to prevent your TB infection from becoming TB disease. You will take the medicine for 6 to 9 months.

Can TB disease be treated?

Yes. If you have TB disease, you will take several TB medicines for 6 to 9 months to cure TB disease.

What can be done to stop the spread of TB?

The most important factor is for the patient to take his/her TB drugs as prescribed by the doctor and to cover the nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing.