

Basic Tuberculosis Facts

This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Tuberculosis, or TB, is one of the world's deadliest diseases. Every year, nearly nine million people around the world become sick with TB disease. While the number of people in the United States with TB disease has been slowly decreasing since 1993, it's still a problem among certain groups.

Hello, I'm Dr. Kenneth Castro, Director of the Division of Tuberculosis Elimination at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

TB is a disease caused by bacteria that are spread from person-to-person through the air. TB bacteria are put into the air when a person with the disease coughs, sneezes, speaks, or sings. People nearby may breathe in these bacteria and become infected. TB bacteria usually attack the lungs, but can attack any part of the body, including the kidney, the spine, and brain.

There are two forms of TB. The first form is latent TB infection. People with latent TB infection don't feel sick, don't have symptoms, and can't spread TB bacteria to others.

People with latent TB infection can go on to develop TB disease. This is the second form. People with TB disease feel sick, have signs and symptoms, and may spread TB bacteria to others.

Symptoms of TB disease may include a bad cough that lasts three weeks or longer, pain in the chest, and coughing up phlegm, sometimes with blood. Other symptoms include weakness or fatigue, weight loss, no appetite, chills, fever, and night sweats.

While anyone can be infected with TB bacteria, some people are more likely to get sick with TB disease.

Those with a higher chance of getting TB disease include people with HIV infection, those who have been infected with TB bacteria in the last two years, people with other health problems that make it hard for the body to fight disease, people who abuse alcohol or use illegal drugs, and those who were not treated for TB infection or TB disease in the past.

Two kinds of tests are used to detect TB bacteria in the body- the TB skin test and TB blood tests. These tests can be given by a health care provider or local health department.

Not everyone needs a TB test. Only certain people who are at increased risk should be tested for TB. If you think you've been exposed to someone with TB disease, contact your health care provider or local health department to see if you should be tested.

The good news is that both latent TB infection and TB disease are treatable. Treatment for latent TB infection can keep you from developing TB disease. TB disease can be treated and cured by taking several drugs, usually for six to nine months.

It's very important to finish taking medicine for TB, and to take the drugs exactly as prescribed. If you stop taking the drugs too soon, you can get sick again.

If you don't take TB medicine correctly, the bacteria that are still alive may become resistant to the drugs. TB that's resistant to drugs is harder and more expensive to treat. We want to prevent that from happening. Local health departments offer support to those being treated for TB to help them successfully complete the recommended treatment.

To learn more about TB, visit www.cdc.gov/tb.

For the most accurate health information visit, www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.