

TUBERCULOSIS DISEASE (TB)



Tuberculosis, or “TB,” is a disease caused by germs called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* bacteria. Not everyone who has TB germs in their body gets sick. There are two conditions caused by TB bacteria: [latent TB infection \(LTBI\)](#) and TB disease. LTBI means you have TB germs in your body without feeling sick. Tuberculosis or TB disease is when TB germs have become active in your body because your immune system cannot stop them from growing.

Having TB disease means you will have signs and symptoms of illness. Usually, TB disease gets into the lungs, but it can also get into the lymph nodes, bones, joints, and other parts of the body. If the TB disease is in your lungs or throat, you may be able to spread the TB germs to family, friends, and people you frequently spend time with. If you have TB disease in other parts of your body such as lymph nodes, bones, or joints, you usually cannot spread TB germs.



How did I get TB?

- ▶ TB germs are spread through the air from one person to another. People with TB disease can spread it to others when they cough, laugh, sing, or sneeze. If you breathe air that has TB germs, you may get LTBI. Over time, some people with LTBI will go on to develop TB disease.
- ▶ You **cannot** get TB from shaking hands, sitting on toilet seats, or sharing food and drinks.



What are the signs and symptoms of TB disease?

If you have TB disease, you may have some or all of the following signs and symptoms:

- ▶ Cough that lasts more than three weeks
- ▶ Chest pain
- ▶ Chills and fever
- ▶ Night sweats
- ▶ Unexplained weight loss
- ▶ Coughing up blood
- ▶ Feeling weak or tired



What tests are available for TB disease?

- ▶ The TB skin test (Mantoux test) or a TB blood test will show if you are likely to have TB germs in your body.
- ▶ A chest x-ray shows whether the TB germs have hurt your lungs.
- ▶ Sputum (phlegm) tests show if TB germs are in coughed-up sputum.
- ▶ Your doctor may do other tests to look for TB disease in other parts of your body.



How will I know if I have TB disease in my lungs?

- ▶ A positive tuberculin skin test or TB blood test
- ▶ An abnormal chest x-ray
- ▶ Signs and symptoms of TB disease





How is TB disease treated?

Tuberculosis is a serious disease that can be cured with the right treatment and medications. If you are diagnosed with TB disease, you need to take special TB medicines to kill the TB germs.

- ▶ TB germs are strong and live for a long time. You might have to take medicine for a while before you begin to feel better.
- ▶ You must keep taking your TB medicines for at least 6-9 months.
- ▶ Even if you feel better, do not stop taking your medicine until your doctor says it is ok.
- ▶ It is important to **keep all your appointments** with your doctor until your TB treatment is finished. The doctor will watch you closely and may do more tests to make sure all the TB germs are being killed.
- ▶ Take your TB medicines at the same time every day.
- ▶ Do not drink beer, wine, or liquor while taking TB medicines.

Staff from the local health department will support you during your treatment. They will meet with you regularly with you to watch you take your medications. This is called directly observed therapy (DOT). DOT will help you complete your treatment in the shortest amount of time.



What medication side effects should I look for?

Like all medicines, the medicines used to cure TB disease can have side effects. Some people take TB medicines without any problems. **Call or see your doctor if you have any of these side effects:**

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| ▶ Nausea* or vomiting | ▶ Blurred vision or a change in your vision | ▶ Aching joints |
| ▶ Poor appetite | ▶ Ringing in your ears | ▶ Fever for more than three days |
| ▶ Chills and fever | ▶ Trouble hearing | ▶ Skin rash |
| ▶ Yellow eyes or skin | ▶ Dizziness | ▶ Bleeding or bruising easily |
| ▶ Numbness or tingling in fingers or toes | | |

*Some people have mild nausea when they begin taking pills. If this happens to you, try eating a small amount of food with your pill(s) or take it at bedtime. If you are still nauseated after three days, call your doctor.

