

Tuberculosis (TB)

Description

Tuberculosis (TB) is caused by a germ which generally affects the lungs. The germ is transmitted from person to person by airborne droplets. In most cases the infection is passed to others through close contact. If an individual has active TB and coughs or sneezes without covering the mouth and nose, droplets containing the tuberculosis germs are sprayed into the air and may be inhaled by anyone near the person. A tissue should always be used when coughing, sneezing or spitting and hands should be washed promptly.

Phases

Tuberculosis occurs in two phases.

PHASE I: INFECTION

The germs have entered the body. The infection itself usually produces no symptoms or problems. In some people, the infection can progress to produce the second phase. The risk of asymptomatic (no symptoms) infection progressing to active disease is highest in the first two years after infection.

PHASE II: DISEASE (ACTIVE TB)

This phase is the dangerous component. Once infection has progressed to active disease, symptoms occur and treatment is vital. It is during this phase that the patient becomes infectious to others.

Symptoms

Most people who have TB germs in their body do not have an active case of the disease. Even if the disease is active, the symptoms are sometimes so mild and vague that they are ignored until the disease is quite advanced. The first symptoms of disease (active TB) can be similar to symptoms of other illnesses. These include cold and flu symptoms such as; fatigue, fever, frequent coughing, sharp pain in the chest and some people with TB may cough up blood.

Diagnosis

A TB skin test is a method to detect infection. Many people experience a positive/reactive skin test. In order to find out if you have active TB, you need to have a chest x-ray.

If you have a positive skin test **and** a normal chest x-ray this means you have been infected but the disease is not active and you are not yet contagious (you cannot give the disease to anyone else).

**NOTE: ONCE YOU HAVE A POSITIVE SKIN TEST, IT GENERALLY STAYS POSITIVE FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE.
HOWEVER, IF THE TB WAS ACQUIRED IN THE LAST COUPLE YEARS
AND IS LEFT UNTREATED IT MAY DEVELOP INTO ACTIVE INFECTIOUS TB.**

Treatment

If you have been infected, there is medication available to lower the chances that the infection will develop into the active disease. The medication must be taken for at least six months, most preferably 9 months. If it is not, a drug resistant form of TB may grow and the drugs will no longer help.

The following criteria would determine whether or not someone would be prescribed medication:

1. TB skin test result is positive for someone under age 35.
2. Person, regardless of age, with past symptoms of TB who has not been treated with adequate medication.
3. Person, regardless of age, with significant reactions to positive TB skin testing and abnormal chest x-rays.

Treatment (Continued on page 2)

4. Newly infected person who develops a reactive (positive) TB skin test in the past two years and has previously tested negative.
5. People who have had close contact with active TB sufferers.
6. People with TB skin test reactions and other medical conditions known to increase the risk of TB (diabetes, HIV infection, etc.).

TB and HIV

Infection from HIV (the virus that is believed to cause AIDS) weakens the immune system. Someone with TB and HIV infection has a very high risk of getting active TB disease.

Without treatment, these two infections can create a debilitating illness and possibly shorten the life of the person infected. Some people who are infected with both HIV and TB will not react to the TB skin test. This is because the immune system is not working properly.

**ANYONE WHO IS HIV INFECTED AND HAS A NEGATIVE SKIN TEST SHOULD ALSO HAVE OTHER MEDICAL TESTS,
IF THEY HAVE SYMPTOMS OF ACTIVE TB DISEASE.**

For More Information:

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