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TUBERCULOSIS (TB)

OVERVIEW



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What Is Tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by bacteria (germs) called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis.* These germs spread from person to person through the air. For example, a person with TB disease in their throat or lungs can spread the germs in the air when they cough, sneeze, talk, or sing. If another person breathes in the air that has these germs, they can become infected.

QuickNote

There are two types of TB: **latent TB infection** and **TB disease**. Latent TB infection can turn into TB disease if it is not properly treated. Flip to the "TB Types" tab for more information.

TB disease usually attacks the lungs, but it can also affect other parts of the body such as the kidneys, spine, and brain. **TB is curable and preventable, but if it is not treated properly, it can be fatal.**

TB: Get the Facts

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

- TB is the world's leading cause of death from a single infectious agent.
- There were 10,388 reported TB cases in the U.S. in 2024.
- 10.7 million people worldwide fell ill with TB in 2024.
- 572 Americans died of TB-related causes in 2023.

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A Word About TB Transmission

People with TB disease are most likely to spread it to people they spend time with every day, such as family members, friends, and coworkers. However, it is important to note that TB disease **cannot** spread by the following means:

You cannot get TB from:

- **Shaking hands**
- **Sharing food, utensils, or drinks**
- **Sharing toothbrushes**
- **Touching bed linens or toilet seats**
- **Kissing**

QuickStart

This guide provides an overview of TB symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment based on the most up-to-date information provided by the CDC. It is not a diagnostic tool. For more information or an official TB diagnosis, consult with your health care provider.

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Types of Tuberculosis

Two TB-related conditions exist:

1. Latent TB infection
2. TB disease

1. Latent TB Infection

Latent TB infection occurs when TB bacteria live in the body without making the person sick. Most people with TB germs in their bodies have latent TB infection, which means they:

- Have no symptoms.
- Don't feel sick.
- Can't spread TB bacteria to others.
- Usually have a positive TB skin test or positive TB blood test.

Many people with latent TB infection never develop TB disease because their bodies fight off the infection.

QuickFact

About 5%-10% of people with latent TB who do not receive treatment will develop TB disease at some time in their lives.

2. TB Disease

Latent TB infection becomes TB disease if the bacteria become active (i.e., the body's immune system can't stop them from multiplying). People with TB disease usually feel sick and may spread the bacteria to others.

Some people develop TB disease within weeks of becoming infected if they have a weak immune system. Other people may get sick years later if their immune system is weakened by another illness (e.g., cancer, diabetes).

TAB 2

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Latent TB Infection vs. TB Disease

Latent TB Infection	TB Disease
No symptoms	Symptoms such as cough, chest pain, weight loss, and fatigue. (Flip to the "Symptoms" tab for more.)
Not contagious	Contagious
Do not feel sick	May feel sick
Positive skin test or blood test result	Positive skin test or blood test result
Normal chest X-ray and a negative sputum smear	Abnormal chest X-ray, or positive sputum smear or culture
Consider medication to prevent TB disease	Need medication to treat TB disease



QuickStat

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that up to 13 million Americans might currently be living with latent TB infection.

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Risk Factors

Since TB is carried in airborne particles, anyone who is near a person with TB disease is at risk of getting infected. You are more likely to be exposed to TB germs if you:

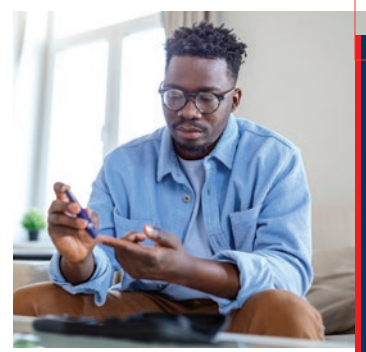
- Traveled to a country where TB is common.
- Work or live in a place where TB is prevalent (e.g., homeless shelter, long-term care facility, prison).
- Are a health care worker.

QuickNote
TB is found in the U.S., but it is more common in other countries such as India, China, and the Philippines.

Who is more likely to develop TB disease?

People with weakened immune systems are more likely to develop symptoms after TB infection, such as those who:

- Have human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).
- Have chronic conditions (e.g., diabetes, kidney disease).
- Abuse alcohol or inject illegal drugs.
- Are under 5 years old.



QuickFact
TB is the leading cause of death of people with HIV.

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Symptoms

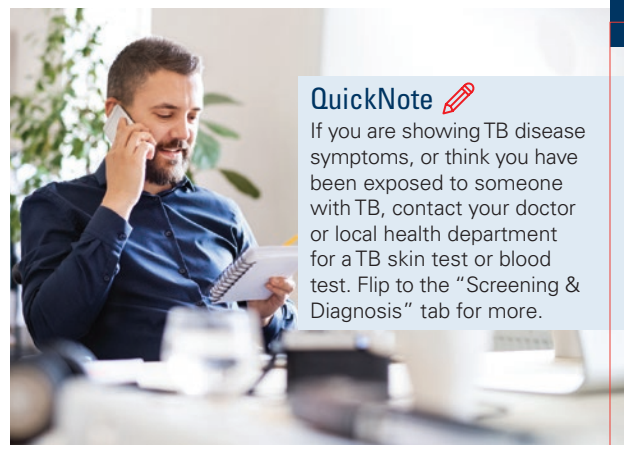
People who develop TB disease have active TB germs that are growing inside their body and making them sick. TB bacteria usually grow in the lungs and may cause the following symptoms:

- Bad cough that lasts three weeks or longer
- Chest pain
- Coughing up blood or sputum (phlegm from deep inside the lungs)

Symptoms of TB disease in other parts of the body depend on the area affected and may include the following:

- Weakness; fatigue
- Weight loss
- No appetite
- Fever; chills
- Night sweats

These symptoms are often mild for many months, which results in delayed treatment and increased risk of spreading the infection to others.



QuickNote

If you are showing TB disease symptoms, or think you have been exposed to someone with TB, contact your doctor or local health department for a TB skin test or blood test. Flip to the "Screening & Diagnosis" tab for more.

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Screening & Diagnosis

TB screening is used to look for signs of TB germs in people who have been exposed to someone with TB disease or who have a high risk of exposure. There are two kinds of tests used to detect TB bacteria in the body:

1. TB skin test
2. TB blood test

Your health care provider or your local health department can let you know which test is best for you.

A positive TB skin test or blood test only indicates that a person has been infected with TB bacteria. It does not tell whether the person has latent TB infection or TB disease. Other tests are needed to see whether the person has TB disease.

1. TB Skin Test

The TB skin test is completed in two visits. On the first visit, a health care professional uses a tiny needle to place a small amount of fluid (tuberculin) under the skin in the lower part of your arm. The fluid makes a small bump on your arm.

After two to three days, you return for the second visit. A health care professional assesses the test spot on your arm to see if your skin reacted. The professional will let you know whether the bump means that you're likely to have TB germs in your body.

2. TB Blood Test

A health care professional uses a small needle to take a blood sample from a vein in your arm. A small amount of blood is collected into a test tube or vial. You may feel a little sting when the needle goes in or out. This usually takes less than five minutes. The test tube or vial is then sent to a laboratory for analysis.

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The Results

- **Positive TB skin or blood test:** The person has been infected with TB bacteria. Additional tests are needed to determine if the person has latent TB infection or TB disease.
- **Negative TB skin or blood test:** The person's body or blood did not react to the test and latent TB infection or TB disease is unlikely.

QuickNote

TB Testing in Pregnancy: There is a greater risk to a pregnant woman and her baby if TB disease is not diagnosed and treated. TB skin and blood tests are both considered valid and safe throughout pregnancy.

Diagnosing TB

Everyone with either TB symptoms or a positive TB test result should be evaluated for TB disease. If a person has symptoms, but a negative TB test result, they should still be evaluated for TB disease.

Latent TB infection: Diagnosed if a person has a positive TB test result and a medical evaluation does not indicate TB disease.

TB disease: Diagnosed if a person has a positive TB test result and further medical evaluation, such as medical history, physical examination, chest X-ray, and other laboratory tests, indicate TB disease.

QuickFlip

Flip to the next tab to learn about the different treatment options for latent TB infection and TB disease.

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Treatment

Without treatment, latent TB infection can turn into TB disease. If not treated properly, TB disease can be fatal. Treatment for both latent TB infection and TB disease involves taking antibiotics:

- **Latent TB infection:** Medicine is taken for three to nine months. Treatment helps ensure TB disease is not developed in the future.
- **TB disease:** Medicine is taken for six to nine months. Treatment will almost always cure TB if medication is taken right away and exactly as prescribed. If directions are not followed, TB germs can become antibiotic resistant (i.e., the medicine may stop working and the TB becomes hard to cure).

During Treatment

If you are being treated for TB disease of the lungs or throat, you are probably contagious. It is important to stay home for a few weeks so that TB germs are not spread to others. Protect the people you live with by:

- Covering your nose and mouth.
- Opening windows when possible.
- Not getting too close to them.

Your health care provider will let you know when you can resume normal activities outside of the home.

Vaccination

Bacillus Calmette-Guérin (BCG) is a vaccine for TB, but it is not widely used in the U.S. It is often given to infants and small children in countries where TB is more common to protect them from getting severe forms of TB disease. The vaccine does not reliably protect people from getting TB disease in the lungs, which is the most common form of disease in the U.S.

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Resources



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Medline Plus





American Lung Association

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID)





World Health Organization (WHO)

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OVERVIEW

Although TB is preventable and curable, it remains the world's deadliest infectious disease. Quick detection and treatment are vital in stopping the spread of TB. Use this guide to learn more about:

- Risk factors and symptoms
- Screening and diagnosis
- Treatment and prevention



This guide is provided to help readers find answers and support. Always consult with health care providers before starting or changing any treatment. QuickSeries Publishing is not engaged in rendering medical advice or professional services and makes no representations or warranties, expressed or implied. This information should not be used for diagnosing or treating a health problem. Providing references to other organizations or links to other resources or websites does not imply endorsement of the information or services provided by them; those organizations are solely responsible for the information they provide.

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