

Tuberculosis (TB)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Cook County DEPT. of
Public Health
A division of Cook County Health

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What is TB?

- Tuberculosis (TB) is a slow-growing bacterial infection that infects humans and can be spread to others.
- Not everyone infected with TB germs becomes sick.
- There are two types of TB: latent (inactive) TB and active TB disease.
- TB usually affects the lungs. It can also affect other parts of the body, including the brain, kidneys, or spine.
- Tuberculosis is a serious illness, but can be treated and cured with appropriate medication.
- If not treated properly, TB disease can be fatal.

What is a Latent TB Infection (LTBI)?

- Latent TB Infection (LTBI) is also called inactive TB. If you have LTBI:
 - TB germs are in your body, but they are not making you sick with symptoms.
 - You cannot spread TB to other people.
 - Isolation is not recommended or required if you are diagnosed with LTBI.
 - Get treated. Without treatment, LTBI can become active TB disease, even many years later.

What is Active TB Disease?

- Active TB disease happens when TB germs grow in your body and make you sick.
 - Some people get sick soon after becoming infected. Others may get sick years later.
 - If you have active TB disease in your lungs or throat, you may spread TB germs to other people.
 - Isolation and masking is recommended if you have active TB disease.
 - Active TB disease can be serious, even deadly. It can be treated with medicine.

How is TB diagnosed?

- Skin test
- Blood test
- Chest X-ray
- Sputum sample

How does TB spread?

TB spreads through the air but infection usually requires prolonged or repeated close contact (especially indoors) with someone who has active TB disease. A person with active TB disease in the lungs or throat can put TB germs into the air when they cough, speak or sing. People nearby can breathe in the germs and become infected.

Can TB germs stay in the air?

Yes, TB germs can stay in the air for several hours, depending on the place and its airflow. TB is more likely to spread indoors, especially in places with poor airflow. It is less likely to spread outdoors.

Can I get TB from touching someone?

No. TB spreads through the air, not by touching people or objects. TB is **not** spread by:

- Shaking hands
- Sharing food or drinks
- Touching bed sheets or toilet seats
- Sharing toothbrushes
- Kissing

Who is most likely to be exposed to TB?

You may have a greater chance of being exposed to TB if you:

- Spend time with someone who has active TB disease.
- Were born in or often travel to a country where TB is common.
- Live or have lived in a group setting where TB can spread easily, such as a shelter, jail or prison.
- Work in a place where TB may be more likely to spread.

Tuberculosis (TB) Frequently Asked Questions

Who is more likely to get sick from TB?

Not everyone infected with TB germs gets sick. You may have a greater chance of developing active TB disease if:

- You were recently infected with TB.
- Your immune system is weak.
- You have certain health conditions, such as diabetes, cancer or HIV.
- You take certain medicines that weaken your immune system.

What should I do if I was around someone with active TB?

- Contact your health care provider or local health department.
- They can tell you if you need a TB blood test or TB skin test.
- Tell them when you were around the person who has active TB disease.

What are the symptoms of active TB disease?

Symptoms depend on where TB germs are growing in the body.

Active TB disease in the lungs may cause:

- A bad cough that lasts 3 weeks or longer
- Chest pain
- Coughing up blood or mucus (phlegm)
- Night sweats

Other symptoms may include:

- Chills
- Fever
- Feeling weak or tired
- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss

Can TB cause symptoms in other parts of the body?

Yes. TB can affect other parts of the body. Symptoms may include:

- Lymph nodes (swelling under the skin)
- Kidneys (blood in the urine)
- Brain (headache or confusion)
- Spine (back pain)
- Throat (hoarseness)

What should I do if I have symptoms of active TB?

- Contact your health care provider or email CCDPH at cd_tb_ccdph@cookcountyhhs.org to ask if you should be tested.

Does LTBI cause symptoms?

No. People with LTBI (inactive TB):

- Do not feel sick from TB.
- Do not have symptoms of TB disease.
- Cannot spread TB germs to other people.

Can TB be prevented?

Yes. If you have LTBI, taking medicine can prevent it from becoming active TB disease. If you have active TB disease, taking medicine as directed can help you get better and prevent spreading TB to other people.

What should I do if I have active TB disease?

Follow your health care provider's instructions. If you have active TB disease in your lungs or throat, you may need to:

- Stay home from work or school until your doctor tells you that you are no longer contagious.
- Take all TB medicine as directed.
- Cover your mouth when you cough.

Your health care provider will tell you when it is safe to be around other people.

What are the most important things to remember?

- TB spreads through the air.
- People with LTBI cannot spread TB to others.
- People with active TB disease of the lungs or throat may spread TB to others.
- TB can be treated.