



1. What is TB?

“TB” is short for tuberculosis. There are two kinds of TB: **TB infection** and **TB disease**. **TB infection** means you have “sleeping” (inactive) TB germs in your body and can’t infect anyone. These germs can live in your body without making you sick. **TB infection** can later become **TB disease** when these germs “wake up” (become active) and multiply. If you have **TB disease**, you can infect other people.

2. Who gets TB?

Anyone can get TB. You are more likely to get **TB infection** if you spent time with someone with **TB disease**, recently came to the U.S. from a country with a lot of TB, or if you spent time in a group living situation. You are more likely to get **TB disease** if you have **TB infection** and are HIV positive, are a substance abuser, are very young, are elderly, or have a condition that weakens your immune system, like diabetes or cancer.

3. How is TB spread?

TB is spread through the air from one person to another. TB germs are passed when someone who is sick with **TB disease** of the lungs or throat coughs, sneezes, speaks, sings or laughs. Anyone near the sick person can inhale the TB germs. You can’t catch TB from clothes, dishes, food or body contact with someone who has TB.

4. How do you know if you have TB?

A TB skin test is used to help detect **TB infection**. A small needle is used to put a liquid testing material under your skin. In 2-3 days, you return to your health care provider who will check to see if there is a reaction to the liquid. In some cases, a special TB blood test is given to test for **TB infection**.

Other tests are needed to show if you have **TB disease**. An x-ray of your chest can tell if there is damage to your lungs from TB. The phlegm (“flem”) you cough up can be tested in a lab to see if there are TB germs in your lungs.

If TB disease is in your lungs, you may cough a lot, cough up phlegm, cough up blood, or have chest pain when you cough. You may also feel weak, lose your appetite, lose weight, have a fever, or sweat a lot at night.

5. How is TB treated?

If you have **TB infection**, you can take medicine to help prevent getting **TB disease** later.

TB disease can be treated by taking several anti-TB medicines. If you have **TB disease**, it is very important that you finish all of your anti-TB medicines and take the medicines exactly as you are told by your health care provider. It takes at least 6 months to 1 year to kill all the TB germs in your body. If you stop taking the medicines too soon, you can become sick again. If you do not take the medicines correctly, the germs that are still alive may become difficult to treat.

6. Should someone with TB infection be restricted from work?

No, people with **TB infection** are not contagious and can't spread TB to others.

7. Should someone with TB disease be restricted from work?

If **TB disease** is in your lungs or throat, you can give TB germs to your family and friends. They may become infected with TB germs and get sick with **TB disease**. That is why you may have to be separated from other people until you can't spread TB germs. Taking your medicines as your health care provider instructs will shorten the time you need to be separated from other people.

8. What can be done to prevent the spread of TB?

If you have **TB disease**, you need to take all your medicines as directed by your health care provider. You should always cover your mouth when you cough! Your health care provider may recommend that your family and others with whom you have spent a lot of time have a TB skin test. If these people have a positive reaction to the test, their health care provider will probably order a chest x-ray to see if they have **TB infection** or **TB disease**. If they have a negative reaction to the TB skin test, they should have their TB skin test repeated after 2-3 months.

Sources

1. *Tuberculosis Facts—TB Can Be Treated*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). www.cdc.gov/tb/pubs/tbfactsheets/cure_eng.pdf.
2. *Tuberculosis Facts — You Can Prevent TB*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). www.cdc.gov/tb/pubs/tbfactsheets/prevention_eng.pdf.
3. *Tuberculosis Facts—Exposure to TB*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). www.cdc.gov/tb/pubs/tbfactsheets/exposure_eng.pdf.

For more information, please visit the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health web site: www.publichealth.lacounty.gov.