

What is Tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by bacteria called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. The most common place to get TB is in the lungs. However, other organs of the body can also become infected. Not everyone infected with TB bacteria becomes sick. As a result, two TB-related conditions can develop: Latent TB infection and Active TB disease. People with Latent TB have the bacteria in their body but do not have symptoms. The bacteria can become active at a later time causing Active TB.

Signs and Symptoms

Occasionally early disease of the lungs may have few or no symptoms.

Latent TB Infection:

- No symptoms
- Cannot spread TB to others
- Skin-test is usually positive
- Normal chest x-ray

Active TB infection:

- A bad cough that lasts 3 weeks or longer
- Pain in the chest
- Coughing up blood or sputum (phlegm from deep inside the lungs)
- Weakness or fatigue
- Weight loss
- Lack of appetite
- Chills
- Fever
- Night Sweats

How is it spread?

TB is spread through the air from one person to another. The TB bacteria are put into the air when a person with active TB disease of the lungs or throat coughs, sneezes, speaks, or sings. People nearby may breathe in these bacteria and become infected.

Treatment

Latent TB:

Latent TB cannot be passed on to others. Usually, treatment is prescribed to keep the bacteria from growing into an active infection. Because there are less bacteria in a person with latent TB infection, treatment is much easier. Usually, only one drug is needed to treat latent TB infection.

Active TB:

Active TB can be passed on to others. TB disease can be treated by taking several drugs for 6 to 9 months. It is very important that people who have TB disease finish the medicine and take the drugs exactly as prescribed. If they stop taking the drugs too soon, they can become sick again. If they do not take the drugs correctly, the germs that are still alive may become resistant to those drugs. TB that is resistant to drugs is more difficult and more expensive to treat.

Prevention

People who are at greatest risk of exposure should be skin tested for TB. Those at risk include health care workers, people living in areas with high incidence of TB, and those with HIV. Talk to your doctor if you feel that you may be at risk for exposure to TB or if you feel that you may have the disease.

This fact sheet is for informational purposes and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care professional. For more information about communicable disease, speak to your health care provider or call the Ingham County Health Department at (517)-887-4308.

Visit our website at <http://hd.ingham.org>

or the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention at: www.cdc.gov

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Updated: May 2016