

Quick Facts

- 1 TB bacteria are spread through the air when a person who is sick with TB disease coughs, laughs, sings, or sneezes. They cannot spread through shaking hands or sharing food.
- 2 If someone breathes in air that has TB bacteria, they can get TB infection.
- 3 The only way for a person to know if they have TB infection is to have a TB skin test or blood test.
- 4 If someone has TB infection that means their immune system has contained the bacteria, so the bacteria are not making the infected person sick.
- 5 Since a person with TB infection has the TB bacteria contained, they cannot spread TB to others.
- 6 If a person with TB infection does not take medicine to kill the TB bacteria, they can eventually get sick with TB disease. Someone with TB disease can spread the TB germs to others.

Tuberculosis Infection



What is Tuberculosis (TB)?

TB is a disease caused by bacteria called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. The bacteria usually attack the lungs, but can attack any part of the body such as the kidney, spine, and brain. If not treated properly, TB disease can be fatal. TB is spread through the air when a person with TB disease of the lungs or throat coughs, sneezes, speaks, or sings. Other people who spend a lot of time near the person with disease may breathe in these bacteria and become infected. The bacteria are not spread through shaking hands or sharing food.

What is TB Infection?

Not everyone infected with TB bacteria becomes sick. People who are infected but not sick have what is called TB infection. People who have TB infection do not feel sick, do not have any symptoms, and cannot spread TB to others because their immune system is healthy enough to keep the bacteria from growing. Without treatment for TB infection, some people go on to get TB disease, especially those who already have weak immune systems.

What is TB Disease?

If an infected person's immune system cannot stop the TB bacteria from growing, the bacteria will begin to multiply in the body and cause TB disease. The bacteria attack the body and damage organs. Some people develop TB disease soon after becoming infected, before their immune system can fight the bacteria. Other people may get sick years later, at a time when their immune system weakens. In fact, 1 in 10 people infected with TB infection eventually develop TB disease if not treated. People with TB disease of the lungs or throat can spread TB to others when they cough or laugh. People with TB disease typically have a cough lasting 3 weeks or longer, pain in their chest, blood in their cough, weakness or tiredness, weight loss, no appetite, fever, and/or sweating at night.

How Can I Find Out if I Have TB?

People typically discover they have TB infection through a TB skin or blood test. A positive test only means a person has TB bacteria in their body, not that they have TB disease or that they can spread TB to others. Someone with a positive TB test will need to have other tests to find out if they have TB disease. A person with TB infection should take treatment to prevent them from developing TB disease in the future. A person with TB disease should receive further tests and treatment. The health department will also work with a person with TB disease to prevent the spread of TB to others and test other people who may already have been exposed by spending time with the sick person.