

Tuberculosis is an infectious, potentially fatal disease that usually attacks the lungs, although other parts of the body may be affected. TB can be caused by any one of several bacteria; the most common in this country is *Micobacterium tuberculosis*.

TB was once one of the leading causes of death in the United States, but antibiotic medicine has helped drastically reduce the death rate from TB. Unfortunately, the number of TB cases is on the rise again in this country. One reason is an increased number of people with weakened immune systems. Illegal immigrants bring new cases into the country, as well.

TB is spread from person to person through tiny droplets in the air, usually through sneezing or coughing. People in close confines -- in prisons, homeless shelters or nursing homes -- are more likely to contract TB than others. A healthy person must be exposed to the bacteria continually for several months to be infected. People with weakened immune systems, such as patients with HIV infection or drug abusers, are more susceptible to TB infection.

Most healthy people exposed to the TB bacteria will not develop TB. In some people, however, the bacteria lie dormant within a person's lungs, sometimes for years. A person with latent TB has a 10 percent chance of eventually developing active TB. People with latent TB who are in poor health or who have a weakened immune system, however, may reactivate their TB infection. A person with active TB is infectious and will have signs and symptoms listed below.

Diagnosis of TB is first made through a skin test, which shows whether a person has been exposed to the TB bacteria. To determine whether a person has an active infection, the doctor will look for signs and symptoms listed below and order a chest x-ray. The doctor will analyze a sample of sputum to help determine which medication will work best to kill the strain of bacteria the person has.

If untreated, TB can damage the lungs, eventually leading to death. Treatment for TB includes antibiotics and other medication to kill the bacteria. A drug regimen usually lasts six to 12 months because the TB bacteria are difficult to kill. That's why it's important for a person on TB treatment to continue until entirely finished.

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### **Signs/Symptoms:**

#### Early symptoms:

- Bad cough that lasts longer than two weeks
- Chest pain

#### Late symptoms:

- Coughing up blood or sputum
  - Weight loss
  - Fever
  - Night sweats
  - Loss of appetite
  - Weakness or fatigue
  - Brownish-red, tender nodules under the skin particularly on the shins
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### **Consult Your Doctor If:**

- If you have any of the above signs or symptoms.
- If you learn that someone you are in close contact with has TB.

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It is recommended that I do not take the Mantoux TB skin test annually due to a previous positive reaction. I have reviewed the information above and acknowledge that I am free from the signs and symptoms of TB.

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Signature

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Date