

## What is TB?



**When people with TB in their lungs or throat cough, laugh, sneeze, or even talk, the germs that cause TB may be spread into the air. If another person breathes in these germs there is a chance that they will contract the bacteria. However, repeated contact is usually required for a symptomatic infection.**

It is not easy to become infected with tuberculosis. Usually a person has to be close to someone with TB (tuberculosis) for quite a long period of time. TB is usually spread between family members, close friends, and people who work or live together. TB is spread most easily in closed spaces over a long period of time. Even if someone becomes infected with tuberculosis, that does not mean they will become symptomatic with the condition. Most people who become infected do not develop symptoms because their body's defences protect them.

### Who gets TB?

Anyone can get tuberculosis (TB) at any age. However, some groups of people are at higher risk of getting the active form of TB.

The groups that are at high risk include:

- People who have not been immunised or vaccinated (vaccination against TB is routinely included in child immunisation schedules).
- People with HIV infection.
- People in close contact with those known to be infected with TB (particularly if those with TB do not take their medication as prescribed).
- People with medical conditions that make the body less able to protect itself from disease (for example: diabetes, the dust disease silicosis, or people undergoing treatment with drugs that can suppress the immune system, such as long-term use of Cortisone and related medicines).

- People who work in or are residents of long-term care facilities serving patients with TB are at risk for the symptomatic condition.
- Healthcare workers and others working in nursing homes, prisons, and some hospitals.
- People who are malnourished (get inadequate nutrients from their diet).
- Alcoholics who may be run down and living in environments that involve close contact with infected persons.

### How do I know if I have it?

A person with TB disease may have any, all, or none of the following symptoms:

- A cough that will not go away.
- Feeling tired all the time.
- Weight loss.
- Loss of appetite.
- Fever.
- Coughing up blood.
- Night sweats.

These symptoms can also happen with other types of lung disease so it is important to see a doctor and to let the doctor determine if you have TB.

It is also important to remember that a person with active TB may feel perfectly healthy or may only have a cough from time to time. If you think you have been exposed to TB, you'd be best advised to get advice from your doctor.