

# Tuberculosis Facts – You Can Prevent TB

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## What is TB?



“TB” is short for a disease called tuberculosis. TB is spread through the air from one person to another. TB germs are passed through the air when someone who is sick with **TB disease** of the lungs or throat coughs, speaks, laughs, sings, or sneezes. Anyone near the sick person can breathe TB germs into their lungs.

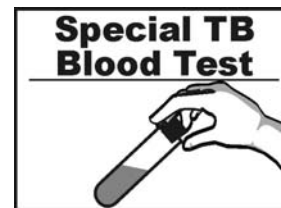
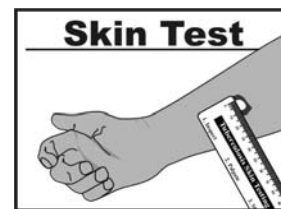
TB germs can live in your body without making you sick. This is called **latent TB infection**. This means you have only inactive (sleeping) TB germs in your body. The inactive germs cannot be passed on to anyone else. However, if these germs wake up or become active in your body and multiply, you will get sick with TB disease.

When TB germs are active (multiplying in your body), this is called **TB disease**. These germs usually attack the lungs. They can also attack other parts of the body, such as, the kidneys, brain, or spine. TB disease will make you sick. People with **TB disease** may spread the germs to people they spend time with every day.

## How do I know if I have been infected with TB germs?

If you have been around someone who has **TB disease**, you should go to your doctor or your local health department for tests.

There are two tests that can be used to help detect TB infection: a skin test or special TB blood test. The skin test is used most often. A small needle is used to put some testing material, called tuberculin, under the skin. In 2-3 days, you return to the health care worker who will check to see if there is a reaction to the test. In some cases, a special TB blood test is given to test for TB infection. This blood test measures how a person’s immune system reacts to the germs that cause TB.

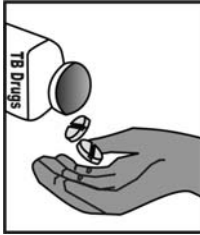


To tell if someone has **TB disease**, other tests such as chest x-ray and a sample of sputum may be needed.

## What should I do if I have TB?



If you have latent TB infection, you may need medicine to prevent getting TB disease later. Usually, only one drug is needed to treat latent TB infection. It is important that you take your medicine exactly as you are told.



TB disease can also be treated by taking medicine. It is very important that people who have TB disease finish the medicine, and take the drugs exactly as they are told. 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 difficult to treat with those drugs.

It takes at least six months to one year to kill all the TB germs. Remember, you will always have TB germs in your body unless you kill them with the right medicine.

People who are more likely to get sick from **TB disease** include:

- people with HIV infection (the virus that causes AIDS);
- people who have been recently infected with **TB** (in the last two years)
- people who inject illegal drugs;
- babies and young children;
- elderly people;
- people who were not treated correctly for TB in the past; and
- people with certain medical conditions such as diabetes, certain types of cancer, and being underweight.

These things make your body weaker. When your body is weaker, it is difficult to fight TB germs.

**Protect your family and friends from TB –  
Get tested and take all your TB drugs!**



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
Division of Tuberculosis Elimination

[www.cdc.gov/tb](http://www.cdc.gov/tb)  
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