

Tuberculosis

Fact Sheet



Maine Center for Disease
Control and Prevention

An Office of the
Department of Health and Human Services

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What is TB?

Tuberculosis (TB) is an infectious disease caused by a bacterium, which usually affects the lungs. However, other parts of the body can also be affected.

How is TB spread?

When someone with TB disease of the lung coughs, sneezes, laughs, or sings, TB germs get into the air. People who share the same air space with this person may breathe in these germs.

Who gets TB?

Anyone can get TB. People at greater risk are family members, friends, and coworkers who share the same air space with the person who has TB disease of the lungs. Others at risk include the elderly, homeless, prisoners, nursing home residents, alcoholics, injection drug users, such as people with medical conditions as diabetes, HIV infection (the virus that cause AIDS), certain types of cancer, and people who are underweight.

What are the symptoms of TB?

General symptoms may include feeling weak or sick, weight loss, fever, night sweats, and a cough lasting three or more weeks. Persons with TB of the lung may have complaints of cough, chest pain, and/or coughing up blood. Other symptoms depend on the particular part of the body that is affected.

What is the difference between TB infection and TB disease?

People with TB infection (without disease) have TB germs in their body but are not sick because the germs are not active. They cannot spread the germ to others. However, these people may develop TB disease in the future, if the TB germ becomes active.

People with TB disease usually have one or more of the symptoms of TB and are sick because the TB germs are active and multiplying in their body. People with TB disease in their lungs can spread TB germs to others.

How can I tell if I have TB?

A TB skin test is given to detect TB infection. If the skin test is positive, a chest x-ray and other exams will be done to make sure you do not have TB disease. You can get a TB test by seeing your doctor.

What is the treatment of TB?

Tuberculosis drugs (antibiotics) are recommended for persons with TB disease. Some persons with TB infection may need to take the drugs to prevent TB disease. These drugs are usually taken for 6 to 12 months.

What can be done to stop the spread of TB?

The most important factor is for the patient to take his/her TB drugs as prescribed by the doctor and to cover their nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing.

What is multi-drug resistant TB?

Multi-drug resistant TB can develop when TB patients do not take their TB medications as prescribed by the doctor. It makes TB more difficult to treat. When resistance occurs, one or more of the TB drugs can no longer kill the TB germs.

Where can I get more information?

For more information contact your healthcare provider or local health center. You can also contact the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention by calling 1-800-821-5821. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website - <http://www.cdc.gov> - is another excellent source of health information.