

Tuberculosis

Pulmonary tuberculosis (TB) is a contagious bacterial infection that involves the lungs, but may spread to other organs.

Causes, incidence, and risk factors

Pulmonary tuberculosis (TB) is caused by the bacteria *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. You can get TB by breathing in air droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person. This is known as primary TB, which is the most common kind.

In the United States, most people will recover from primary TB infection without any signs of the disease. The infection may stay inactive (dormant) anywhere from a few weeks to even several years: this is known as latent TB. If the bacterium reactivates, it becomes active TB, and it may start to cause health problems. In rare cases, TB can spread to other areas of the body, in what is known as disseminated tuberculosis.

Seniors, infants, and people with weakened immune systems are at the highest risk of infection by TB. Those who are in frequent contact with infected people, have poor nutrition, do drugs, or live in crowded or unsanitary living conditions are also at increased risk.

In the United States, there are approximately 10 cases of TB per 100,000 people. However, rates vary dramatically by area of residence and socioeconomic status. Rates of infection have recently increased due mostly to



the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Symptoms

TB usually doesn't cause symptoms at first. When pulmonary TB becomes active, or when it begins to spread throughout the body, signs may include: the coughing up of blood or mucus, excessive sweating (especially at night), fatigue, fever, and unintentional weight loss. Other symptoms include difficulty breathing, chest pain, wheezing, enlarged or tender lymph nodes in the neck or other areas, and unusual breathing sounds.

Treatment

TB, whether primary or disseminated, is generally treated with a combination of several drugs. You may need to take many different pills at different times of the day for 6 months or longer, with careful instructions by your doctor. You may also be admitted to a hospital for 2 - 4 weeks to avoid spreading the disease until you are no longer contagious. Your doctor or nurse is required by law to report your TB illness to the local health department.

Prevention

TB is a preventable disease, even in those who have been exposed to an infected person. Skin testing for TB is used in high risk populations or in people who may have been exposed to TB, such as health care workers. Never hesitate to get tested if you believe you have

been exposed to TB, or if you're showing signs of infection. The earlier you identify the disease, the better.

Learn more at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0001141/>

HIGHLIGHTS

The Miami-Dade County Health Department has a Tuberculosis Program dedicated to identifying, treating, and preventing cases of TB within the county area.

For any questions or concerns, call the main program line at 305-575-5401.

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For more health topics, visit www.dadehealth.org/atoz/atoz.asp