

Tuberculosis (TB)

Awareness



“In 2013, 9 million people fell ill with TB and 1.5 million died from the disease.”

World Health Organization, October 2014

What is tuberculosis (TB)?

Tuberculosis (TB) is a bacterial infection which occurs throughout the world. It can be serious – even fatal – but is treatable with careful drug regimens.

TB is caused by the bacteria *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. It can infect many body parts, but is most common in the lungs.

What are the symptoms?

Most people who get infected with TB do not have symptoms. This is called “latent TB”. Some people go on to develop symptoms, which is known as “active TB”.

Typical symptoms include:

- Cough (sometimes contains blood)
- Weakness
- Weight loss
- Fever
- Night sweats

How does TB spread?

TB is spread through the air, but is not as easy to catch as colds or flu.

People with active TB spread infection, through the droplets from their mouth and nose when they cough, sneeze or speak.

Healthy people usually get TB only after long periods of exposure in closed spaces. For this reason, family members, close friends and healthcare workers are most at risk.

People with compromised immune systems (e.g. with HIV) and those living in countries with high TB rates, are also at higher risk.

The disease is **not** transmitted via casual contact, such as shaking hands.

Tuberculosis and HIV

TB is a leading cause of death in HIV patients. Having both an HIV infection and TB is a killer combination. HIV impairs a person’s immune system. People with HIV are more likely to develop active TB if they get infected.

Treatment

TB is treatable with antibiotics. People must finish their treatment, even if they feel better.

There is a growing problem of drug-resistant TB. It is largely related to improper or incomplete drug use among TB patients. Drug resistant strains are difficult and expensive to treat.

To stop TB

Early diagnosis and treatment is the key to preventing the spread of TB. Know the symptoms; seek medical advice and testing early. Encourage others to do the same. If treatment is recommended, ensure the medications are taken on time and the full course is completed.

