TUBERCULOSIS

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

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.

Anyone can get TB. People at greater risk are family members, friends, and co-workers 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, people with medical conditions such as diabetes, HIV infection (the virus that causes AIDS), certain types of cancer, and people who are underweight.

GENERAL SYMPTONS 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.

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 germs become 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.

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.

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.

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

Multi-drug resistant TB can develop when TB patients do not take their TB medication as prescribed by the doctor. It makes TB more difficult to treat. When resistance occurs, one or more of the TB drugs can not longer kill the TB germs.

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