

# GENERAL TUBERCULOSIS INFORMATION

## What is Tuberculosis (TB)?

Tuberculosis is a disease caused by tiny germs (bacteria) called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. Other names for tuberculosis are “TB,” “consumption,” “white plague” or “Koch’s Disease.”

TB is a serious disease that usually affects the lungs, but can also be found in other parts of the body, such as lymph nodes, kidneys, bones, spine or brain. People with active TB disease usually feel sick, have symptoms and may spread the germs to other people. TB can be fatal if it is not treated properly. TB can be prevented, treated and cured with medicine that kills TB bacteria.

## How is TB Spread?

TB germs are spread through the air. When a person has TB germs in their lungs, pleura or throat, they spray the germs into the air when they cough, sneeze, speak, laugh, sing or play a wind instrument.

The TB germs can stay in the air for hours. People who spend a lot of time every day with someone who has active TB, may breathe the germs into their lungs and become infected. These people may live in your home or be family, close friends, co-workers or classmates.



- Not all active TB is contagious. TB that is outside the lungs or throat cannot be spread to other people.
- TB cannot be spread to other people by shaking hands, sharing dishes or utensils, sitting on a toilet seat, using the same towels or by sexual contact.
- Most people who are in contact with TB germs do not become infected or develop TB disease.

## Who is at Risk of Getting Infected with TB?

Anyone can become infected with TB. Some people are at higher risk for TB infection and should be tested. These are people who:

- Are close contacts of someone who has contagious TB
- Are immigrants from countries that have high rates of TB
- Have other illnesses or take medicine that weakens their immune system (e.g., people with diabetes, cancer or HIV/AIDS)
- Are malnourished, homeless, or abuse alcohol or drugs
- Are residents of long-term care or correctional facilities
- Live in Aboriginal or Inuit communities with high rates of TB

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## **What is the Difference between Latent TB Infection (LTBI) and TB Disease?**

People with latent TB infection (LTBI) have germs in their body that are sleeping (dormant or inactive). They are not sick and cannot spread TB to other people. However, they can become sick with TB disease in the future. Latent TB infection can be treated to prevent TB disease.

People with active TB disease have TB germs in their bodies that are growing and spreading. They are sick and can spread TB to other people if the active disease is in their lungs or throat. TB disease can be treated with medicine that kills the TB germs. The medicine must be taken for many months to kill all the TB germs and cure the disease.