

TUBERCULOSIS (TB)

Caused by bacteria *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*

CAUSES

Tuberculosis (TB) is caused by a bacterium called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. The bacteria usually attack the lungs, but TB bacteria can attack any part of the body such as the kidney, spine, and brain. Not everyone infected with TB bacteria becomes sick.

Some people develop TB disease soon after becoming infected (within weeks) before their immune system can fight the TB germs. Other people have latent TB infection and may get sick years later, when their immune system becomes weak for another reason. Treating latent TB infection is effective in preventing TB disease.

SYMPTOMS

General symptoms may include feeling weak or sick, weight loss, fever, and/or night sweats. Symptoms of TB of the lungs may include cough, chest pain, and/or coughing up blood. TB can also affect other parts of the body, such as the brain, kidneys, or spine. Other symptoms depend on the part of the body that is affected.

TB disease in the lungs may cause symptoms such as:

- Cough that lasts three weeks or longer
- Pain in the chest
- Coughing up blood or sputum (phlegm from deep inside the lungs)

Other symptoms of TB disease are weakness or fatigue, weight loss, no appetite, chills, fever, and sweating at night.

People who have latent TB infection do not feel sick, do not have any symptoms, and cannot spread TB to others.

TRANSMISSION

Tuberculosis is a disease that is spread from person to person through the air. TB usually affects the lungs. The germs are put into the air when a person with TB of the lung coughs, sneezes, laughs, or sings. A person who breathes in the bacteria can become infected. Anyone can get TB, but some people are at higher risk. Those at higher risk include:

- People who share the same breathing space (such as family members, friends, co-workers) with someone who has active TB disease.
- Travelers to countries where TB is common.

- People who live in high-risk residential settings, such as nursing homes, homeless shelters, or correctional facilities.
- People with medical conditions that weaken the immune system, such as diabetes, certain types of cancers, being underweight, substance use through injections, treatment for rheumatoid arthritis or Crohn's disease, organ transplants, severe kidney disease, head and neck cancer, or medical treatments such as corticosteroids.
- Children, especially those under age 5.

TESTING

There are two types of tests for TB infection, a blood test, and a skin test. Blood tests are more accurate, especially for those that have received the TB vaccine.

You should get tested for TB if:

- You have spent time with a person known or thought to have infectious TB disease.
- You frequently travel to countries where TB disease is common.
- You currently live, used to live, or are employed in a large group setting where TB is more common, such as a homeless shelter, prison, jail, or nursing home.
- You are a health care worker who cares for patients with TB disease.
- You live in high-risk residential setting or use injectable drugs.

In addition, children, especially those under 5, have a higher risk of developing TB disease once infected. Therefore, testing for TB infection in children who may have been exposed to a person with TB disease is important.

Tuberculosis testing can be done by your health care provider or your local county health department. To find a county health department, visit [FloridaHealth.gov/CHD](https://www.floridahealth.gov/CHD).

TREATMENT

TB germs can live in your body for years without causing symptoms. If you have inactive TB, treating it is the best way to protect yourself from getting sick with active TB disease.

If you have been diagnosed with active TB disease, you can be treated with medicine. You will need to take and finish all of your TB medicine as directed by your health care provider.