



# FACT SHEET: TUBERCULOSIS

## GENERAL INFORMATION

- Tuberculosis (TB) is a communicable disease spread from person-to-person through the air. It generally affects the lungs, but can also affect the brain, kidneys, and spine.
- TB can be fatal. If left untreated, TB has a mortality rate of greater than 50 percent.
- It is caused by a bacterium (or germ) called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*.
- Not everyone infected with TB germs becomes sick. As a result, two TB-related conditions exist: active TB and inactive or latent TB.



## WHAT IS INACTIVE OR LATENT TB?

- TB germs can live in the body without making a person sick. People with inactive TB are infected with TB germs but they do not have active TB, do not feel sick, do not have any symptoms, and cannot spread TB to others. However, they may develop the disease in the future.

## WHAT IS ACTIVE TB?

- TB germs become active when they destroy tissues, multiply in the body and the immune system can't stop them from growing. People with active TB disease feel sick. They may also be able to spread the germs to people they spend time with every day.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF ACTIVE TB?

- Symptoms of active TB disease include: A cough that lasts three weeks or longer; Chest pain; Coughing up blood or sputum (phlegm from deep inside the lungs); Weakness or fatigue; Weight loss; Loss of appetite; Chills; Fever; Night sweats
- The initial symptoms of TB can occur at any point after exposure. People exposed to TB often do not develop active TB disease. However, once a person has been infected with the bacteria, TB can develop months or even years after the initial infection.

## HOW IS TB SPREAD?

- TB of the lungs (pulmonary) is spread from human-to-human through the air when a person with TB germs coughs, sneezes, speaks or sings. The germs can stay in the air for hours. People who contract TB generally get it from breathing in air contaminated with the bacteria.
- People with TB in other parts of the body cannot spread the disease.

## QUICK FACTS

- TB is one of the world's leading infectious disease killers.
- CDC estimates up to 13 million people in the United States live with inactive TB.
- Without treatment, 1 in 10 people with inactive TB will get sick with active TB disease. TB disease can spread to others and be deadly.
- In 2023, there were 9,633 cases of TB disease reported in the United States.

**GET MORE FACTS AT:**  
**NKYHEALTH.ORG**



**NKYHEALTH**  
NORTHERN KENTUCKY HEALTH DEPARTMENT



# FACT SHEET: TUBERCULOSIS

## RISK FACTORS

- Anyone can get TB, but a person might have a higher risk for TB if they:
  - Were born in or frequently travel to countries where TB is common, including some countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.
  - Live or used to live in large group settings where TB is more common, such as homeless shelters, prisons, or jails.
  - Recently spent time with someone who has active TB disease.
  - Have a weaker immune system because of certain medications or health conditions such as diabetes, cancer, and HIV.
  - Babies and young children, the elderly and people who inject drugs.
  - Work in places where TB is more likely to spread, such as hospitals, homeless shelters, correctional facilities, and nursing homes.

## TREATMENT

- Both inactive TB and active TB disease can be treated. There are several safe and effective treatment plans recommended in the United States.
- TB germs are strong, and it can take a long time for them to die.
- Treatment for inactive TB can take three, four, six, or nine months depending on the treatment plan.
- Treatment for active TB disease can take four, six, or nine months depending on the treatment plan.
- Drug-resistant strains of TB develop when people with active TB disease do not take their medicine as prescribed and the bacteria develop a resistance to the drug. Drug-resistant TB is a very serious problem and very expensive and difficult to treat.

## TESTING

- There are two common test methods for TB: a skin test and a blood test.
  - The skin test can be administered by your health care provider or at the health department. A small amount of testing fluid is injected under the skin on your lower arm. After two or three days, the amount of swelling is measured. The health care worker can determine by the amount of swelling if you have developed TB.
  - The blood test measures your blood's response to TB proteins to determine if you have been infected.
- If the blood test or skin test result is positive, TB germs have been found in the body. A health care provider will have to do other tests to determine if it is inactive TB or active TB. These tests may include a chest x-ray, and a test of the sputum (phlegm) coughed up.



GET MORE FACTS AT: [NKYHEALTH.ORG](http://NKYHEALTH.ORG)



**NKYHEALTH**  
NORTHERN KENTUCKY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

