



Community Health Connections

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Fact Sheet

Tuberculosis (TB)

What is Tuberculosis (TB)

Tuberculosis can be a life threatening infection that primarily affects the lungs. Tuberculosis has plagued humans for millennia. We are able to find damages in the lungs of Egyptian mummies dating back 5,000 years. Regardless of the advances in treatment of today's medical community TB is a global pandemic. It is fueled by the spread of HIV/AIDS, poverty, lack of health services, and drug resistant strains of the bacterium that causes the disease. It is passed from person to person through airborne droplets when a person with the infection coughs, talks, or sneezes. In general, you need prolonged exposure to an infected person before becoming infected yourself. Even with that you may not develop symptoms of the disease; or symptoms may not occur until many years later. Left untreated TB can be fatal. With proper care, most of the cases of TB, including those resistant to the drugs normally used to treat TB, can be treated.

TB is a Common Infection

The infection is common. About 1/3 of the human population is infected with TB.

What are the Signs of TB

Although you may be infected and your body may have the virus in it, your immune system often will keep you from becoming ill, or having "Active TB". This condition sometimes called latent TB causes no symptoms and is not contagious. Although, if you are tested with a TB skin test, you may test positive.

Active TB is a condition when you have TB and you are sick. At this point, you are able to spread TB to others. Unfortunately, the infection may be without symptoms for years, even though it is active and causing damage.

Signs of Active TB that affects your lungs is coughing, which often the only indication of initial active infection. Other signs and symptoms may include:

- Cough that lasts three or more weeks, which may be discolored with blood
- Unintended weight loss
- Fatigue
- Slight fever
- Night sweats
- Chills
- Loss of appetite
- Pain with breathing or coughing (called pleurisy)

TB can also target almost any part of your body. When TB occurs outside of the lungs signs and symptoms vary, depending on the organs or system that is involved.

Factors Associated with TB

Anyone can contract TB, but certain factors increase your risk of the disease.

- Lower immunity: people with HIV/AIDS, people on chemotherapy, receiving treatment with corticosteroids, and antiarthritic medications are some of the causes for lowered immunity
- Close contact with someone infected with TB
- Nationality: people from regions with high rate of TB, countries such as Africa, Asia, Latin America, Soviet Union
- Age: Older adults are greater risk, as aging or illness may have weakened their immune system

- Long term drug and/or alcohol abuse
- Malnutrition
- Lack of medical care
- Health care worker
- International travel

Prevention

All told TB is largely preventable. Keep your immune system healthy and get regular tests. If you are latent, talk with your PCP about therapy and finish all of your antibiotics as prescribed. If you are active, stay at home, insure adequate ventilation, and cover your mouth.

When should you seek medical attention

Consult your physician if you have any questions.