

# Tuberculosis

**Harris County**

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**HCPHES**

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**Public Health & Environmental Services**

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# What is tuberculosis (TB)?



- ▶ Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by bacteria called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*.
- ▶ The TB bacteria can affect any part of the body, but usually affects the lungs.
- ▶ If not treated properly, a person who has **TB infection** can develop **TB disease**.
- ▶ If a person develops **TB disease** and does not get appropriate medical treatment he/she can die.

# How do you get TB?



- ▶ TB is generally spread through the air when a person who has **TB disease** frequently sneezes, coughs, speaks or sings near others for a long period of time.
- ▶ Persons who breathe in air containing TB germs can become **infected with TB**.
- ▶ Typically, only close contacts of a person who has **TB disease** are considered to be at risk.

# How is **TB infection** different from **TB disease**?

- ▶ People with **TB infection** have a positive TB skin test but they:
  - are not sick,
  - do not have symptoms,
  - cannot spread TB to others,
  - can develop **TB disease** if not treated for **TB infection**.
- ▶ When **TB infection** is treated it greatly reduces the chance that you will ever develop **TB disease**.

# How is **TB infection** different from **TB disease**?

- ▶ People with **TB disease**:
  - have symptoms,
  - often have a positive skin test, and/or
  - an abnormal chest X-ray.
- ▶ People with **TB disease** can spread the TB germs to others.
- ▶ People with **TB disease** are prescribed medications to cure the disease.

# What are the symptoms of TB?

- ▶ Symptoms of TB disease include:
  - feelings of sickness or weakness,
  - weight loss,
  - fever, and
  - night sweats.
- ▶ When TB disease affects the lungs, additional symptoms may include:
  - a bad cough that lasts longer than 2 weeks,
  - shortness of breath, pain in the chest and
  - coughing up blood.



# How do I get tested for TB?

- ▶ A TB skin test is performed by injecting a small amount of fluid in the skin on the lower part of the arm.
  - You will need to return within 48-72 hours to have a trained health care worker see if the skin test is positive or negative.
- ▶ You can get a skin test at your local health department or at your healthcare provider's office.
- ▶ If you have a positive reaction to the skin test (**TB infection**), your healthcare provider may do other tests to see if you have developed **TB disease**.



# How is TB treated?

- ▶ TB disease can usually be cured by taking several medicines for 6-12 months.
- ▶ It is very important that people who have TB disease take the medication exactly as prescribed.
- ▶ If you stop taking the medication too soon, you can become sick again.
- ▶ Also, if you do not take the medication correctly, the germs may become resistant to those medications and become more difficult to treat.



# Remember...

- ▶ **TB infection** occurs when a person has breathed in the TB germ, but the person is not sick.
- ▶ **TB disease** can develop in a person with TB infection if they do not get medical treatment.
- ▶ A person with **TB disease** is sick and may have several symptoms of the disease.
- ▶ If left untreated, persons with **TB disease** can die from TB.