

Tuberculosis

Tuberculosis (TB) is often considered a disease of the past. Nearly one-third of the world's total population, or about two billion people, are infected with the bacteria that causes TB. Each year, approximately 9 million people around the world become sick with TB. Through public health efforts of timely case diagnosis, contact investigation, administration of therapy, prevention, and education, the United States has seen a steady decline of TB. Although the number of people with disease has declined, TB remains a public health concern in Oklahoma.

What is TB?

TB is an infectious disease caused by the bacteria which usually affects the lungs. However, other parts of the body can also be infected.

How is TB spread?

When someone with TB disease of the lung coughs, sneezes, laughs, or sings, TB bacteria get into the air. People who share the same air space with this person may breathe in the bacteria.

Who gets TB?

Anyone can get TB. People at greater risk are: family members, friends, and coworkers who share the same air space with the person who has TB disease of the lungs. Others at risk include the elderly, homeless, prisoners, nursing home residents, alcoholics, injection drug users, people with medical conditions such as diabetes, HIV infection (the virus that causes AIDS), certain types of cancer, and people who are chronically malnourished.

What are symptoms of TB?

General symptoms may include feeling weak or sick, weight loss, fever, and night sweats. Persons with TB of the lungs may have complaints of cough, chest pain, and/or coughing up blood. Other symptoms depend on the particular part of the body that is affected.

What is the difference between TB infection and TB disease?

People with TB infection (without disease) have TB bacteria in their body but are not sick because the bacteria are not active. They cannot spread the bacteria to others. However, these people may develop TB disease in the future, if the TB bacteria become active. People with TB disease usually have one or more of the symptoms of TB and are sick because the TB bacteria are active and multiplying in their body. People with TB disease in their lungs can spread TB bacteria to others.

How can I tell if I have TB?

A TB skin test is given to detect TB infection. If the skin test is positive, a chest X-ray and other exams will be done to make sure you do not have TB disease. Contact your local health department or provider to get tested.

What is the treatment for TB?

Tuberculosis drugs (antibiotics) are recommended for persons with TB disease. Some persons with TB infection may need to take drugs to prevent TB disease. These drugs are usually taken for 6 to 12 months.

What can be done to stop the spread of TB?

The most important factor is for the patient with TB disease to take his/her drugs as prescribed by the doctor and to cover the nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing.

What is drug resistant TB?

Drug resistant TB can develop when TB patients do not take their TB medication as prescribed by a doctor. It makes TB more difficult to treat. When resistance occurs, one or more of the TB drugs can no longer kill the TB bacteria.