

# TUBERCULOSIS



**Doctor:** I'm suspecting you have tuberculosis.

**Patient:** What is that doctor?

**Doctor:** Tuberculosis, or TB, is an infectious bacterial disease which most commonly affects the lungs. Normally, in healthy people, infection with *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* often causes no symptoms, since the person's immune system acts to "wall off" the bacteria. You're having night sweats, chest pain, fever, cough, weakness and weight loss. Those are the common symptoms of tuberculosis.

**Patient:** Can tuberculosis be treated? Are there any tests I have to undergo to confirm that I do have tuberculosis?

**Doctor:** It can be treated with antituberculin drugs such as isoniazid, streptomycin, pyrazinamide, rifampin, ethambutol and rifapentine for 6 to 12 months. I have to let you begin a high-carbohydrate, high-protein, high-vitamin diet with supplemental vitamin B6 to counter tie isoniazid side effects. You also have to be in bed rest until symptoms subside. We also have to provide prophylactic therapy for 6 to 12 months to members of your household or your immediate contacts. As with the tests, I would initially go for the sputum test since you've been coughing. A sputum test shows if there are TB germs in a person's lungs. Sputum is phlegm from deep inside the lungs. Next, I would have to go with the tuberculin skin test (TST), also called Mantoux skin test. This tests shows if a person has been infected. Once the Mantoux skin test shows that a person has been infected, a chest x-ray should be given. The x-ray will show if there has been any damage done to the lungs.

**Patient:** Tuberculosis is communicable, right? How can I prevent it from spreading?

**Doctor:** You just have to follow these measures: Frequent hand washing; Cover the mouth when coughing; Proper disposal of used tissues; Proper cleansing of eating utensils; Proper disposal of food wastes; Isolation

**Patient:** Why do I need to isolate myself?

**Doctor:** It is because tuberculosis is transmitted from person to person via droplets from the throat and lungs of people with the active respiratory disease. When you cough, sneeze, laugh, or speak, you are spreading the TB germs into the air. TB germs can also be transmitted through eating or drinking contaminated, unpasteurized (raw) milk products produced in areas where *Mycobacterium bovis* is present. A person is not likely to get TB from someone coughing in the subway or at a restaurant. TB is not spread by sitting on a toilet seat or by sharing dishes, utensils, sheets, clothing or other inanimate objects.

**Patient:** Okay then. I'll take the necessary tests and have the treatments needed as soon as possible. I want to be cured from tuberculosis in no time.

## TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

- **How important is the awareness of the disease?**
- **What can be done to prevent tuberculosis?**
- **What are the different modes of transmission of TB?**