

# Get the Facts About **TB** Disease

TUBERCULOSIS



**Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention**  
National Center for HIV/AIDS,  
Viral Hepatitis, STD, and  
TB Prevention



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## Randy speaks out about TB:

“Last winter my cousin Carl got real sick with TB disease. Since I live with him, I should have had a TB skin test, but I never got around to it. I don’t have health insurance, so I didn’t go to the doctor right away when I got a bad cough. When the cough lasted 3 weeks, and I started having night sweats, well, I knew something was wrong. The clinic doctor thought I might have TB. The nurse gave me a TB skin test and then I had a chest x-ray. Sure enough—I had TB disease.”



## Get the facts, then get the cure.

You may have just been told you have TB disease. You also may be feeling a bit confused. This is normal. You are learning a lot of new information. It may help if you look at this brochure and read what some people like you have to say about TB.

Randy has TB disease and is now taking TB medicines. He is taking the TB medicines just like his doctor told him. Soon he will be cured of TB.

We hope the information in this booklet can answer your questions you or your loved ones may have about TB.

## How to best use this booklet:

Read this booklet to learn how other people like you coped with TB disease. Learn all you can about TB and share what you learn with your family and friends. Read through this booklet once. Then put it in a familiar place so you can read it again if you need to.

## There are 3 parts to this booklet.

**Part 1:** Learn how TB is spread.

**Part 2:** Getting treated for TB.

This section also includes answers to questions you may have about TB medicines.

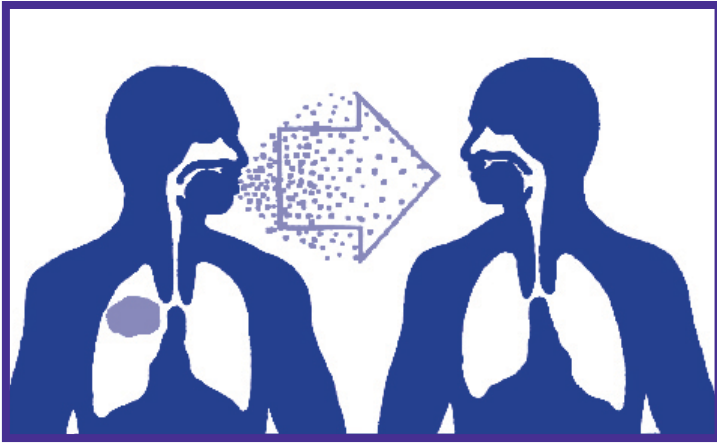
**Part 3:** Get good advice on how to talk to your family about TB.

## What is TB?

TB is short for tuberculosis. TB is a serious disease that can cause a person to become very sick if not treated with medicine. TB usually affects the lungs, but it sometimes affects other parts of the body.

## How did I get TB disease?

- TB is spread through the air from one person to another. The TB germs are passed through the air when someone who is sick with TB disease coughs, laughs, sings, or sneezes.
- If you breathe air that has TB germs, you may get TB infection. This means you have only dormant (sleeping) TB germs in your body. These dormant germs are not making you sick, and you cannot pass these germs to anyone else.
- If these dormant TB germs in your body wake up and multiply, you will get sick with TB disease.
- TB can cause death if not treated with medicine.



TB disease develops from TB infection. People don't know they have TB infection unless they have been tested for TB.

## **Once you have TB infection, you have a higher chance of getting TB disease if you:**

- Have HIV infection.
- Have been recently infected with TB (in the last two years).
- Have other health problems, like diabetes, that make it hard for your body to fight germs.
- Abuse alcohol or inject illegal drugs.
- Were not treated correctly for TB infection in the past.

## Did you know?

Babies, young children, and elderly people also have a much higher chance of getting TB disease if infected with TB germs. This is because their body defenses are not as strong.



## You cannot get TB germs from:

- Sharing drinking containers or eating utensils.
- Smoking or sharing cigarettes with others.
- Saliva shared from kissing.

TB is NOT spread through shaking someone's hand, sharing food, touching bed linens or toilet seats, or sharing toothbrushes.



## Randy's story:

Randy has TB disease. He felt sick for a while. He told his doctor he had been having night sweats and coughing a lot for three weeks. He lost about 10 pounds and felt weak and tired. He was pretty scared the day he coughed up blood.

- Because he had active TB germs in his body, Randy was able to pass TB germs on to others around him when he coughed, sang, or sneezed. How? TB germs are passed through the air from one person to another.
- Randy got treatment. He will need to stay on TB medicines for at least 6 months, or until all the TB germs in his body are killed.
- He talked to his doctor to find out when it was safe to return to work and have friends visit him at home.



### Some signs of TB disease are:

- A bad cough that lasts 3 weeks or longer.
- Pain in the chest.
- Coughing up blood or phlegm from deep inside the lungs.
- Weakness or feeling very tired.
- Losing weight without trying.
- Having no appetite.
- Chills and fever.
- Sweating at night or when you are sleeping.



### **The good news:**

TB disease can be prevented, treated, and cured!

### **Did you know?**

TB germs can sometimes stay alive in the air for a few hours, especially in small places with no fresh air.

Fresh air and sunlight make it harder for TB germs to stay alive. The fresh air scatters the germs and the sunlight kills them.



## How is TB disease treated?

### Treatment for TB disease:

- You will start off with several TB medicines.
- You will need to take your medicines the right way, just as your doctor or healthcare provider tells you.
- You will need to stay on TB medicines for at least 6 months.



Take your TB pills exactly the way your doctor tells you, even if you feel well. It's the only way to kill TB germs.

### If you don't take the pills the right way:

- It can be harder or not possible to cure your TB.
- You can stay sick for a longer time.
- The medicines can stop working, and you may have to take different medicines that have more side effects.
- Even the new medicines may not cure the TB.
- You can pass TB germs on to others.

Talk to your healthcare provider if your TB medicine is making you feel sick. Any medicine can cause side effects, including TB pills. Most people can take their TB medicine without any problems.



### If you are being treated for TB disease, tell your doctor right away if you have:

- A fever.
- A rash.
- Aching joints.
- Aches or tingling in your fingers or toes.
- An upset stomach, nausea, or stomach cramps.
- Vomiting.
- Changes in your eyesight such as blurred vision.
- Changes in your hearing such as ringing in your ears.
- Dizziness.
- Bruising.
- Easy bleeding when cut.
- Less appetite or no appetite for food.
- Tingling or numbness around the mouth.
- Yellow skin or eyes.

## Your doctor will make sure the medicine is working:

During your treatment, you will have occasional blood, phlegm, urine tests, and x-rays as needed to make sure that your medicines are working.

If you have other health problems, like HIV infection or hepatitis, you may have these tests before and after treatment, as well.

## Follow these medicine tips:

1. Take your pills exactly the way your doctor tells you.
2. Take your pills even if you feel well.
3. Talk to your doctor about any side effects from taking the pills.  
Your doctor has tips to help you take your pills.

## Once I complete treatment for TB disease and I'm cured, can I get TB again?

Yes, but this is unlikely. After you take the medicine the right way for as long as your doctor tells you, your chance of getting TB again is low. Now that you have had TB disease, you know what the signs are. If you notice any of those signs, you should call your doctor right away.

## When you have TB disease, you will want to take these steps:

- Take your medicine the right way, as your doctor or healthcare provider tells you.
- Wear a special mask if your doctor says it is needed. If you are not wearing a mask, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. You may see healthcare providers wearing a mask around you so they won't get TB germs from you.
- Keep windows open in your home, if possible, until your doctor says you cannot pass TB germs to others.
- Don't spend time in closed spaces with others until your doctor or healthcare provider says you can't pass TB germs on to others.

# Talking to family and friends about TB

“Letting people know you have TB disease is not always easy. I knew I had to tell my family because I spend a lot of time with them. My sister has two young sons, so I wanted them to get tested right away. Everyone got TB skin tests and all of them were negative, but it may have been too soon for their bodies to react to the test. They will all get another TB skin test in about two months.”



If you have TB disease, you may want to talk to your friends and family about it. If so, share this brochure and other information you have learned about TB with them.

## Let them know:

- Anyone can get TB.
- You are taking your TB pills the right way.
- Usually after you have been on the TB medicine for several weeks, your doctor will be able to tell when you are no longer passing TB germs to others.
- A healthcare worker may speak with them about their chances of getting TB. They may need to have a TB skin test and x-ray.

## Remember—TB can be prevented, treated, and cured.

All of this information is a lot to take in at once. Take each day—one day at a time, as you work toward getting cured of TB disease.

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**For more information on TB, call your  
local health department at**

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**or visit the CDC Division of  
Tuberculosis Elimination website at  
<http://www.cdc.gov/tb>**

**Produced 2005  
Reprinted 2014**

**Developed in partnership with  
The New Jersey Medical School Global Tuberculosis Institute at Rutgers**