

What Parents Should Know About Tuberculosis

What Is Tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis (TB) is a contagious disease, caused by the bacteria *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. The bacteria attack the lungs, but can attack any organ in the body.

Recommended treatment depends on whether a person has:

- Latent TB infection— has no symptoms and can't spread the TB bacteria to others; has the potential to develop active TB disease if not treated
- Active TB disease— has symptoms such as a fever, cough, weight loss; people with active TB can spread the germ to others. Treatment is needed to cure the disease.

How is TB Diagnosed?

TB infection is most commonly diagnosed by a TB skin test or TB blood test. If either of the tests is positive, more tests are needed. These tests may include a chest x-ray and laboratory tests.

How does TB Spread to Others?

TB is spread in the air when a person with active TB disease coughs, sneezes, or speaks. The germs can be inhaled by someone else and they become infected. TB is often spread between people who spend time together every day. TB in children usually comes from being around adults with active TB disease.

TB cannot be spread by sharing a drinking glass or eating utensils, shaking someone's hand, or touching furniture. Not everyone exposed to someone with TB disease will become infected.

Who is at Risk for TB Infection and TB Disease?

Anyone who spends time with someone with active TB disease can become infected. Many people who have latent TB infection never develop TB disease. But some people who get infected are more likely to develop TB disease. These include:

- Infants and young children.
- Having been recently infected with TB bacteria (in the last 2 years).
- Crowded environments (for example, Head Start and Child Care centers).
- Rooms with windows that don't open
- Close contacts of a person with active TB.
- Having a weakened immune system.

How to Stop the Spread of Tuberculosis?

- Your child should be tested for TB infection if there has been possible contact with someone with active TB disease at the center or at home, even if your child has been tested before.
- If your child has latent TB infection, make sure to finish the recommended treatment from your child's doctor. You will need to keep your child at home until your doctor approves your child's return to the center.
- If your child has active TB disease, they may have to go to the hospital for care and treatment. Once discharged, you will need to keep your child at home until your doctor approves your child's return to the center.
- Adults and children at home with active TB disease should cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue; tissues should be thrown away in a sealed plastic bag. Adults with active TB disease should not go to work or school, and avoid close contact with others. Those with active TB should sleep in a bedroom away from other family members; they should air out their room often to the outside of the building.
- Make sure your children are up-to-date on their immunization schedule.

Should a Child with TB infection be excluded from Head Start or Child Care?

Children found to have TB infection should be seen by a health care provider to determine if the child has latent TB infection or active TB disease. If the child has latent TB infection, the health care provider may prescribe treatment to prevent the infection from becoming disease. A child with latent TB infection can't transmit germs to others, the child can return to Head Start or child care. It is important for the child to complete all the medication as prescribed to prevent developing active TB disease.

A child diagnosed with active TB disease must stay out of the center until treatment is started, and the doctor determines the child isn't contagious. The Head Start center or child care provider will ask for a note from the child's doctor to your child's return.

How to Talk to Children about Tuberculosis

- If your child has questions, take time to listen and answer their questions factually and honestly.
- Speak in a calm tone of voice.

Where Can I Learn More?

- [Tips for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers on talking with children about infectious disease outbreaks.](#)