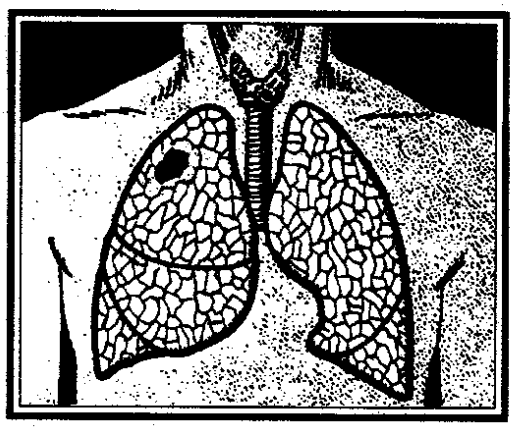
TUBERCULOSIS FACTS – Exposure to TB

What is TB?

"TB" is short for a disease called tuberculosis. TB is spread by tiny germs that can float in the air. The TB germs may spray into the air if a person with **TB disease** of the lungs or throat coughs, shouts, or sneezes. Anyone nearby can breathe TB germs into their lungs.



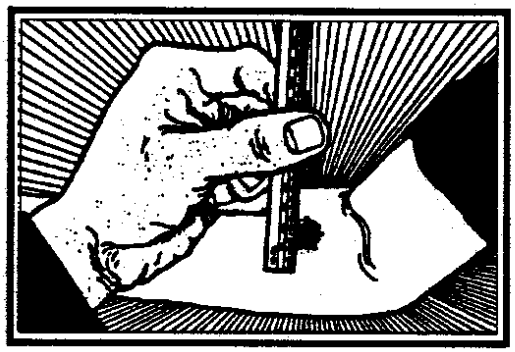
TB germs can live in your body without making you sick. This is called **TB infection**. Your immune system traps TB germs with special germ fighters. Your germ fighters keep TB germs from making you sick.

But sometimes, the TB germs can break away and multiply. Then they cause **TB disease**. The germs can attack the lungs or other parts of the body. They can go to the kidneys, the brain, or the spine. If people have **TB disease**, they need medical help. If they don't get help, they can die.

How was I exposed to TB?

You may have been exposed to TB if you spent time near someone with **TB disease** of the lungs or throat. You can only get infected by breathing in TB germs that person coughs into the air. You cannot get TB from someone's clothes, drinking glass, handshake, or toilet.

How do I know if I have TB infection?



If you have been exposed to TB germs, you will be given a TB skin test. If it is "positive," you probably have **TB infection**. If it is "negative," you may be retested in a few weeks, just to be sure. If you do have **TB infection**, you may need medication.

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A skin test is the only way to tell if you have **TB infection**. This test is usually done on the arm. A small needle is used to put some testing material, called tuberculin, under the skin. In two or three days, a health worker will check to see if there is a reaction to the test. The test is "positive" if a bump about the size of a pencil eraser or bigger appears on your arm. This bump means you probably have **TB infection.**

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