TUBERCULOSIS FACTS – You Can Prevent TB

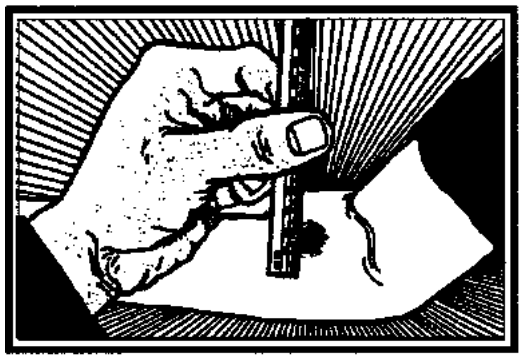
What is TB?

"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 spread. 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 do I know if I have TB infection?



A skin test is the only way to tell if you have **TB infection**. 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**.

What should I do if I have TB infection?

If you have **TB infection,** you may need treatment so you will not get **TB disease** later. This is called "preventive" treatment. Isoniazid (INH) is the anti-TB drug used most often.

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES
Public Health Service
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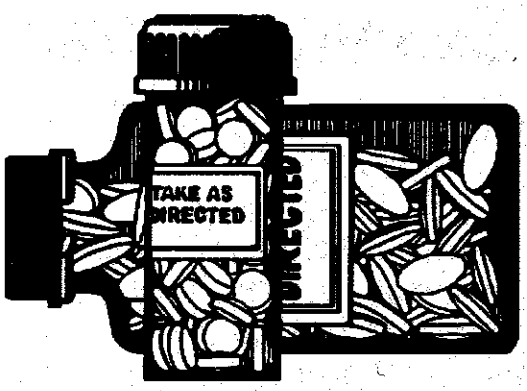

Unless you get preventive treatment, **TB infection** can turn into **TB disease.** Those who are more likely to get sick from **TB disease** include:

- alcoholics or injection drug users;
- people with certain medical conditions such as diabetes, certain types of cancers and being underweight; *and especially*
- people with HIV infection (the virus that causes AIDS).

These things make your body weaker. When your body is weaker, it can't fight TB germs any more and TB infection can turn into TB disease.

It is very important that you take your preventive treatment as your doctor recommends. It takes at least six months to a year to kill all the TB germs. Remember, you will always have TB germs in your body unless you kill them with the right medicine.

Protect your family and friends from TB — take all your anti-TB drugs!

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*U.S. Government Printing Office: 1997 - 633-753/60188