

Information leaflet for a patient with Tuberculosis (TB)

What is tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by a germ called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. TB usually affects the lungs but can affect other parts of the body.

What are the symptoms of TB?

TB disease develops slowly in the body. It may take several months for the symptoms to appear. Any of the following symptoms may be a sign of TB:

- Fever and night sweats
- Cough for more than three weeks
- Losing weight
- Blood in your sputum (phlegm) at any time

If you develop these symptoms, visit your GP (doctor) for advice.

How is TB spread?

The TB germ is usually spread in the air. Some people with TB of the lungs have infectious TB. This means that they can pass TB to other people. The germ gets into the air when someone who has infectious TB coughs, sneezes, talks or sings. Usually you need to be in close contact for a long time with someone who has infectious TB to become infected with the TB germ yourself.

Can anyone get TB?

Yes, anyone can get TB but you are at greater risk if you live in the same house as the person who is sick or if you are in very close contact with them. Only a small number of people who breathe in the TB germ get sick. This can happen within a couple of months of exposure or many years later.

How is TB diagnosed?

There are a number of tests that can be done to check for TB. Your doctor will examine you and decide what tests you need. These may include a chest x-ray or sputum (phlegm) test.

What does the treatment for TB involve?

Treatment involves taking medicine for at least six months and regularly attending an outpatient clinic in the hospital during this period.

Why do I have to take the medicine for so long?

TB germs are killed very slowly. You must continue to take your medicines as prescribed even when you have no symptoms of TB or you no longer feel ill.

Are medicines for TB safe?

All medicines may have side effects. Some side effects are minor, others may be more serious. The clinic doctor will give you information about the different tablets and their side effects. You should discuss any concerns you may have about side effects with the clinic doctor.

What happens if I stop taking my TB medicine?

If you stop taking the medicine before your doctor tells you to stop, your TB may become worse. You may become infectious and pass on the TB germs to your family and other people you come in close contact with. Your TB might become resistant – this means that the medicine stops working and you could become very ill with TB.

Is there anything I should avoid while on this medicine?

We strongly recommend that you don't drink alcohol while on treatment as drinking alcohol increases the risk of damage to your liver.

Please tell the doctor at the clinic if you are taking any other medicines.

Can I carry on with my day to day activities?

Your doctor will advise you about this. People who have infectious TB are usually no longer infectious after a couple of weeks of treatment and can then resume their usual activities.

What is contact tracing?

Sometimes people who have had contact with you (for example, people who live with you or spend a lot of time with you) may need to be checked for TB. A member of the Department of Public Health will get in touch with you to identify your contacts and will arrange any follow-up for these people.

TB is a serious disease. Your doctor is required by law to notify the Department of Public Health of your diagnosis.

If you have more questions, please talk to the doctor at the clinic.

You can also contact your local Public Health Department at

For more information about TB, visit www.hpsc.ie and type TB into the search box at the top right-hand corner of the screen.

