



# Tuberculosis

TB is short for Tuberculosis Bacillus.

**Tuberculosis** is an infectious disease that is caused by a bacterium called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. TB primarily affects the lungs, but it can also affect organs in the central nervous system, lymphatic system, and circulatory system among others. The disease was called "consumption" in the past because of the way it would consume from within anyone who became infected.

## How TB is contracted

When people who suffer from active Pulmonary TB speak, cough, sneeze or spit, they expel up to 40 000 droplets. These droplets spread through the air and can be inhaled by others. A person inhaling less than 10 bacteria may become infected.

Infection begins when this bacterium reaches the lungs and Acute Pulmonary TB can develop. The lungs are normally the area most commonly infected, but the bacteria can be carried to other parts of the body through the blood circulation.

## How can I find out if I have TB?

### Signs to look for:-

- Coughing for two weeks or more
- Coughing with blood in the sputum
- Loss of appetite
- Sweating (especially at night)
- Chest pains, fast breathing, and or difficulty in breathing.
- Weight loss of 3kg or more over a period of 4 weeks
- Recurrent fever/chills lasting more than 3 days

If you have answered yes to one or more of the questions, speak to your doctor or go to a clinic. Especially if you have been in contact with someone who has TB. However, do not think that if you have any of the above symptoms (e.g. sweating), that you automatically are infected, but it pays to be aware of persistent symptoms (especially coughing).

## Tuberculosis can be cured

With the correct medication and the appropriate care, TB can be cured.



## **Important to remember**

- Never stop taking medication prescribed for TB before the treatment has been completed.
- Continue to take medication for as long as the doctor or clinic tells you to.
- If you stop medication before you have finished the medication, you will become sick again and to treat you will be very difficult and sometimes impossible.
- You risk developing MDR (Multi-drug resistant) or XDR (extensively drug resistant) TB if you are not compliant with treatment.

## **Prevention**

Treatment to prevent TB in a single person aims to kill walled-up germs that are doing no damage right now but could break out years from now and become active. If you should be treated to prevent sickness, your doctor usually prescribes a daily dose of isoniazid (also called INH), an inexpensive TB medicine.

You will take INH for up to a year, with periodic checkups to make sure you are taking it as prescribed and that it is not causing undesirable side effects. In some cases, intolerance or allergic response can mandate an alternative treatment that may go on for 18 months. Treatment also can stop the spread of TB in large populations.

## **Awareness is of utmost importance in the fight against TB**

- Make people aware of TB – Talk about TB and that it is curable.
- Encourage people to go for testing for TB.
- Support patients that have TB in order to complete their treatment.

Provision of TB treatment under supervision is critical, because TB treatment takes a long time. Patients need to be supported.

The Department of Health works with different partners in the community who play this role.

