

# Let's talk



## Tuberculosis

### What it is

Tuberculosis (TB) is a potentially fatal bacterial infection, which most often attacks the lungs (pulmonary TB), but can affect other parts of the body too (extrapulmonary TB).

Tuberculosis causes are known to be various strains of a bacterium type called Mycobacteria, particularly the strain Mycobacterium tuberculosis. While tuberculosis is contagious, the infection can be suppressed in people with healthy immune systems. This is known as latent tuberculosis and it's symptom-free.

### How it's spread

TB germs are put into the air when a person with TB disease of the lungs or throat coughs, sneezes, speaks, or sings. These germs can stay in the air for several hours, depending on the environment.

Persons who breathe in the air containing these TB germs can become infected; this is called latent TB infection.

### The symptoms

When the disease is active, tuberculosis symptoms include:

A prolonged mucous-producing cough (usually more than three weeks). The mucous may be bloody

- Chest pain and shortness of breath
- Loss of appetite and weight loss
- Night sweats
- Fatigue
- Overall feeling of being unwell
- Low-grade fever.

TB affecting other parts of the body will produce other symptoms, depending on the organs involved.

Always discuss any unusual symptoms with your doctor if you have been in close proximity with someone infected with TB or if your immune system has been compromised.

### How Do You Get Tested for TB?

There are various tests that can be used to help detect TB infection: a skin test, TB blood test or sputum tests.

The Mantoux tuberculin skin test is performed by injecting a small amount of fluid (called tuberculin) into the skin in the lower part of the arm.

The TB blood tests measure how the patient's immune system reacts to the germs that cause TB.

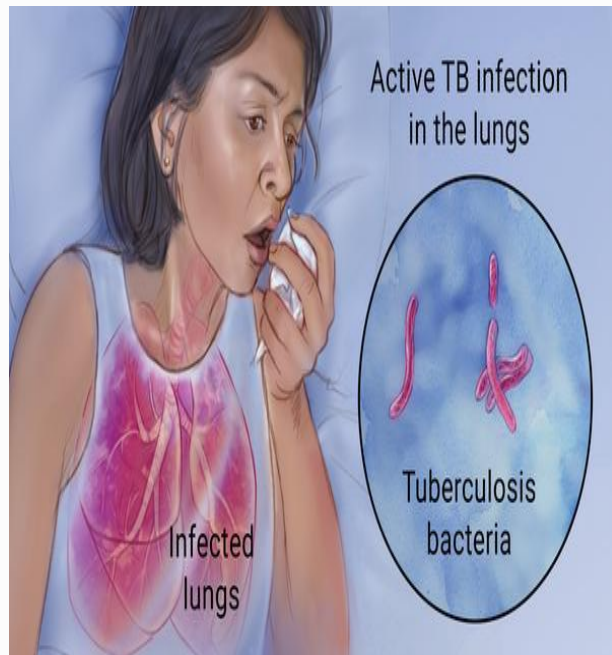
The sputum microscopy test. This is widely used in Africa. It requires a sputum sample to be taken from a patient and results are available within 48 hours.

### What are the treatment options?

Tuberculosis treatment in new-onset tuberculosis cases is usually a six-month combination of various antibiotics to treat the infection and reduce the risk of resistant strains of the disease emerging.

It's essential to take tuberculosis medication as directed for the prescribed length of time, even if the symptoms do disappear sooner, as not adhering to treatment can lead to the development of drug-resistant, multi-drug resistant (MDR) and extensively drug-resistant (XDR) forms of tuberculosis which don't respond to the mainstay drugs of TB treatment anymore.

According to SANTA, cure rates of up to 95 percent can be achieved in TB with minimal drug resistance, which then drops to 50 to 70 percent for the MDR type.



***“South Africa has 500 000 new active TB cases a year, 1369 new cases a day! That is more than HIV”***

### Can it be prevented?

Tuberculosis is transmitted via the respiratory fluids of those with an active infection coughing or sneezing, so an important part of tuberculosis prevention is for those with active infections to take precautions to protect others. This includes staying at home until treatment has made them non-contagious, covering their nose and mouth when sneezing and coughing, and always finishing their entire course of prescribed medication.

If you have latent tuberculosis and are at high risk, such as with HIV, a doctor may prescribe antibiotics to prevent it from developing into the active disease.

### For more info

[www.santa.org.za](http://www.santa.org.za)