

What is TB?



Do many people get tuberculosis (TB)?

Yes, Tuberculosis is a serious problem all over the world. Between 6 and 10 million in South Africa are infected by the **TB** germ.

It is infectious, so it can be passed on from one person to another person. **TB** causes more deaths in South Africa than any other infectious disease.

How does TB spread?

TB is spread through the air. Germs go into the air when someone who has **TB** coughs, spits or sneezes. Then other people can breathe them in. This is why **TB** can spread very easily in overcrowded places.

The **TB** germ is breathed into the body and then attacks the lungs. It causes holes and other damage in the lungs. It can also spread through the blood to other parts of the body.

Who can get TB?

Some people believe that you can only get **TB** if you are poor or if you are an alcoholic, or if you take drugs. This is not true. Anyone can get **TB**. Not every one who has **TB** germs gets sick. It depends on how well your body can fight off disease.

You will find it more difficult to fight off disease if you have the following problems:

- You do not eat healthy foods
- You work in very dusty places
- You drink a lot of alcohol
- You have a disease like high blood pressure, diabetes, HIV or AIDS
- You are tired and stressed from doing heavy work, working long hours, or not sleeping enough

What about smoking?

Smoking is always harmful to your health. Your lungs are already damaged if you have **TB**, and smoking will only make the damage worse.

How do I know if I have TB?



You will probably have some of the following problems if you have TB:

- Coughing for more than two weeks
- Coughing up blood
- Not wanting to eat
- Feeling pains in the chest
- Losing weight
- Becoming short of breath
- Feeling tired all the time
- Sweating at night
- Getting a fever which comes and goes

Get checked by a health worker if you think you have TB

- You should go to your nearest clinic or doctor as soon as possible
- The sister or doctor will ask you exactly how you are feeling and what your problems are. They will examine you
- They may ask you to cough your spit into a small bottle for 2 mornings in a row. The nurse will then send this spit to a laboratory. People in the laboratory will look for **TB** germs in your spit.
- You may also need to have an X-ray of your chest. The health worker will tell you when to come back for the X-ray results.
- If you have **TB** the people you live with need to be checked.

If you have TB, it does not mean you have HIV and AIDS. If you think that you might be HIV positive, go to a clinic and have an HIV test. The test is confidential, and you will not have to pay for it. If you are HIV positive, you are more likely to get TB.

Treatment for TB



How do I take my medicine?

- Take your medicines in the way that your health worker tells you to.
- If you have more than one medicine, take them at the same time.
- Medicines are usually taken from Monday to Friday of each week.
- If your medicines are nearly finished, you can take your green card to any clinic. They will give you more medicines.
- Remember: Go to the clinic for regular check-ups!!

What are the side effects of the tablets?

Many medicines can cause side-effects (problems). The **TB** medicines may cause the following side-effects...

- Nausea and vomiting
- Skin rashes
- Painful joints
- Loss of appetite
- Pink urine

Not everybody feels side-effects and most of them can be treated. Tell the sister at the clinic if you have any of these problems, or any other problem that you think are caused by the medicines. She will help and advise you.

Will I have to sleep at the clinic or hospital?

- Most people who have **TB** do not have to stay at the hospital.
- But sometimes you can be so ill with **TB** that you have to sleep there.
- When you are better, you can go home.
- It is still important to take the medicine at home.

What will happen if I don't go for treatment?

- You will spread the disease to other if you have **TB** and do not get it treated.
- Other people develop very bad breathing problems. **TB** can damage your lungs forever.
- Many people die from **TB** when it is not treated

Must I finish my treatment?

Many of the **TB** germs will stay alive in your body if you do not finish the 6 months' treatment. These germs will be the strongest of all the germs and the most dangerous.

You will get sick again if you stop the medicines before the health worker says you can

Remember: Do not stop your treatment until your health worker says you can. It is very important to complete the full treatment.

I want to take my medicine, but 6 months is a long time. How will I manage?

People who have suffered from **TB** say that taking the medicine every day for 6 months is difficult. So it is a good idea to get somebody to help you take your medicine. This person is called a **DOTS** supporter. This means **Directly Observed Treatment Short – course**.

- Ask at the clinic about getting help with taking your medicine.
- You can choose your helper – the person can be a neighbour, a shop steward at work, a local teacher or a nurse at a clinic.
- It is important that the person is nearby and easy to get to every day.
- Your helper will keep your medicine and give it to you every day.
- Your helper will also encourage you to carry on with the treatment when you get tired of it.
- It is important to take your medicine everyday – even when you feel better.

Can I use traditional medicine to cure TB?

Many people go to traditional healers (sangomas) to help cure their **TB**. It is still important to take your **TB** medicine from the hospital or clinic even if you go to a sangoma. The **TB** medicine that your doctor gives you will make sure that you get better from **TB**.

Living a healthy life with TB



Things to do while you are on treatment

- Continue to take care of yourself and the people around you.
- Eat healthy food to help you fight sickness and to stay a healthy weight.
- Get plenty of rest and fresh air.
- When you are feeling better, talk to your health worker about ways to exercise.

Everybody should eat as many of these different kinds of foods

As they can every day:

- Fruit and vegetables. These foods help to fight sickness.
- Beans, lentils, meat, chicken, fish, milk and eggs. These foods build the body and keep us strong.
- Maas or yoghurt. These help us to digest our food.
- Brown bread, brown rice, pap and samp. These foods give us energy to grow, play work and learn.
- Butter, oil, peanut butter and nuts. These give us energy. They can be added to porridge or other foods.

Prepare and store food safely.

- It is important to store and cook food properly. Cook meat and chicken until there is no pink inside.
- Do not use cracked eggs. Cook eggs very well
- Heat left-over food to boiling point to kill any germs.
- Wash your hands before and after you prepare or eat food.
- Wash all fruit and vegetables in a mixture of one teaspoon of bleach to a litre of water. This will kill germs

Know your rights

- You have the right to privacy and confidentiality – nobody else needs to know about your illness if you do not want them to know.
- You have the right to be treated with respect
- You have the right to know what is being done to you at the clinic

- You have the right to sick leave if you have TB
- You have the right to information about your treatment

Community action

What can we do about the TB problem?

TB is a community problem. This is because when many people in a community have TB, there is a strong chance that other people will catch it. We must prevent TB and help those people who have the disease.

We can work towards better living and working conditions:

- We need houses with enough space and fresh air.
- We need to be able to get healthy foods which do not cost a lot of money.
- We need cleaner workplaces.

We can help people who have TB:

- Be a DOTS supporter. Help someone to take the TB medicines. Ask at the clinic how you can help.
- We can respect them just as we respect everyone else.
- We can join organisations which help people with TB..

All children should be immunised:

TB can also be prevented by giving children a BCG immunisation. This should be given to all children when they are born. This stops them getting sick from TB later in life. Take your child to the clinic to get a BCG if he or she was born at home.

Community Information

The best way of stopping TB from spreading in the community is to make sure that everyone who has TB is properly treated.

Government action

The government is working very hard to stop **TB** from spreading. It has formed partnerships with the media, organisations and workplaces. This is to make sure that everyone knows about **TB** and that it is easy to cure.

Government nurses, doctors and health workers are trained to know about **TB**. They know how to diagnose and treat people.

The earlier you know you have **TB**, the easier it is to treat. This is why government looks for people who might easily get **TB**. This includes children who live with someone who has **TB**.

The government also helps these people by giving them preventative medicine to stop them getting **TB**.

The government helps people who have **TB**. The treatment is of very high quality. You will not have to pay for it. The government uses the **DOTS** method to treat and cure **TB**.

The government is trying to fight the stigma and discrimination around **TB**. They make sure that **TB** patients can go for counselling and get support.

The workplace

Can I carry on working?

- It is not easy to pass on TB to other people if you have been taking medicine for a few days.
- How soon you go back will depend on how sick you are.
- Many people are ready to go back to work after only two weeks
- But remember, once you go back to work, you must carry on with the treatment for at least 6 months.
- It is against the law to fire an employee because he or she has TB.

The dangers of dusty workplaces.

- Working is not harmful if you are on TB treatment. You may need to be on lighter duties until you feel strong again.
- People who work in places where there is lots of dust may get TB more easily.
- It is the duty of your employer to provide a workplace which is safe.

National target:

To achieve 85% cure rate by the year 2005

70% detection rate by year 2005

< 5% interruption rate by year 2005

Challenges to meeting targets:

- Poor adherence to treatment with high interruption rates
- Late presentation of patients to the health facilities
- Lack of knowledge by communities about TB
- Increasing HIV epidemic
- Increasing poverty

Tuberculosis in Children

The main source of transmission of TB infection to a child is usually an adult with positive tuberculosis in the lungs. TB in children is mainly due to a failure to cure the infectious adult patients. Adults who do not complete their TB treatment put young children below ten years of age at risk to become infected with TB bacilli with a high risk of becoming active tuberculosis.

Reasons why children have a high risk of developing active TB disease:

1. **The immune system of young children is less developed** than that of an adult and the risk of developing active TB disease is therefore higher in young children. The chance of developing TB disease is greatest shortly after infection. When children present with active tuberculosis disease their family members and other close contacts should be investigated for TB to find the source of the disease and treat them as necessary.

Therefore a good TB control programme, which will ensure early diagnosis and treatment of adults with infectious form of TB is the best way to prevent TB in children.

2. **In HIV infected children** the risk is very high to develop TB meningitis with often devastating results for the child like deafness, blindness, paralysis and mental retardation as some of the consequences.
3. Tuberculosis and **malnutrition** often go together, and a child with TB disease may present as failure to gain weight with loss of energy and a cough lasting for more than three weeks.

The diagnosis of TB in children:

The diagnosis of tuberculosis in children can be difficult because children under the age of 10 years usually cannot cough up sputum to be send for laboratory investigations to confirm the infection of tuberculosis

- The diagnosis depends mainly on the clinical features of cough, weight loss, with a history of close contact with an infectious adult TB patient.
- Special investigations like a skin test and a chest X-ray can be helpful in making the diagnosis of TB in children.

Prevention of TB disease.

1. **Early diagnosis** and successful treatment of an infectious adult patient is the best way to protect children from becoming infected with TB.
2. **BCG immunization of babies** soon after birth up to 2 years of age will protect them mainly against the development of TB meningitis.