



# What should I know about TB?

## What is TB?

TB is an illness caused by airborne bacteria. It can cause serious health problems – particularly if it is not caught early. But TB is curable, and testing and treatment are free and confidential.

TB can affect nearly any part of the body. But TB in the lungs or throat are the only types that are infectious, which means it can be passed on to other people.

TB IS CURABLE AND TREATMENT IS FREE  
AND CONFIDENTIAL FOR EVERYONE

## How do you get TB?

When someone with infectious TB coughs or sneezes they send droplets into the air that contain the bacteria. You need to breathe in quite a lot of these bacteria to be at risk of developing TB. So you are more likely to catch TB if someone you live with or spend a lot of time with has infectious TB.

Some people become ill with TB soon after they breathe in the bacteria. In other people, the bacteria remain asleep in the body without making them ill. This is known as latent TB. But latent TB can 'wake up', sometimes many years later, and make you ill. This is more likely to happen if illness or other stresses have made your immune system weaker.

## Symptoms

- a cough for 3 weeks
- weight loss
- fever
- night sweats
- fatigue or tiredness
- no appetite

THE SYMPTOMS OF TB CAN APPEAR SLOWLY  
AND YOU MAY NOT HAVE ALL OF THEM.  
ALWAYS SEE A DOCTOR IF YOU ARE WORRIED.

## Who is likely to get TB?

Anyone can get TB but some people are more at risk than others. You are more at risk of TB if you:

- were born in or have links to sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, parts of eastern Europe or other countries with high rates of TB
- are homeless or live in poorly ventilated or overcrowded accommodation (including hostels and prisons)
- are dependent on drugs or alcohol
- have a weakened immune system, through HIV or some other illnesses.

If you are worried you might have TB or that you have breathed in TB bacteria, talk to a doctor as soon as possible.

The sooner you are treated the less likely you are to become seriously ill or to pass TB on to others.

If you do have TB, you will be given a course of antibiotic medication to cure the TB. A TB specialist nurse will support you throughout your treatment.

## Sources of information and support

*Support and advice for people concerned about TB:*

### TB Alert

Phone: 01273 234029

Email: [info@tbalert.org](mailto:info@tbalert.org)

[www.thetruthabouttb.org](http://www.thetruthabouttb.org)

[www.tbalert.org](http://www.tbalert.org)

*Information about TB and a service finder:*

### NHS Choices

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)