

THE  
TRUTH  
ABOUT  
TB

# The Truth About TB and HIV in the African Community



**ALERT**

Stop Tuberculosis Worldwide



**African**

Health Policy Network

(formerly the African HIV Policy Network)

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

## WHAT IS TUBERCULOSIS (TB)?

TB is a curable illness caused by airborne bacteria (germs). The number of people getting ill with TB in the UK is increasing. Much of this TB is among people who have come to the UK from countries where TB is more common. People with weak immune systems – including people living with HIV – are more likely to become ill with TB if they breathe in the bacteria.

## HOW DO YOU GET TB?

When someone with TB coughs or sneezes, they send droplets into the air that contain the TB bacteria. If you breathe in a lot of these you are at risk of getting TB.

Usually, your immune system will wipe out the bacteria that you have breathed in. Even if it doesn't get rid of them, there's only a small chance you will become ill right away. Usually the bacteria will stay asleep in your body, so you will not be ill or able to infect other people.

But sometimes, the bacteria wake up and make you ill with TB. This might happen years after you first breathed them in. This is more likely to happen if your immune system has become weaker, for example if you have HIV.

### TB-HIV CO-INFECTION

Some people with TB also have HIV. This is called co-infection and is more common among people from Africa.

TB can weaken your immune system and make HIV worse. But the good news is that TB can be cured, and HIV is treatable, though it is important to start treatment as soon as you can.



## AM I LIKELY TO GET TB?

Anyone can get TB, but some people are at more risk. This might be because:

- they are from a part of the world where TB is more common, like sub-Saharan Africa
- they spend time in places where it is easier for TB to spread, such as crowded or poorly ventilated homes and social venues
- their immune system may be under pressure from homelessness, or from taking alcohol or drugs
- they may have other health conditions, such as HIV, which makes it harder for their immune system to fight off the bacteria

## SYMPTOMS

TB is most likely to affect the lungs, but it can affect any part of the body. Common symptoms to look out for are:

- a cough that lasts for over three weeks
- weight loss
- fever
- night sweats
- extreme tiredness
- loss of appetite

Symptoms of TB can appear slowly. You may not have all the symptoms and TB symptoms can be similar to those of other illnesses.

## WHAT ACTION SHOULD YOU TAKE

If you have any symptoms that could be TB, you should go to a doctor. The sooner you are treated, the less likely you are to become more seriously ill or to pass TB on to others.

If you have spent time with someone who has TB, or are worried that you may have breathed in TB bacteria, tell a doctor.

If you have been diagnosed with TB and you don't know your HIV status, it is important you have an HIV test as well. Your doctor should offer you one, but if they don't, remember to ask.

Treatment for TB is free for everyone in the UK, and HIV treatment is also free for many people.

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**TB is curable**

There's plenty of information, help and support available for people who are affected by **TB or TB-HIV**



## GETTING INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

### African Health Policy Network (AHPN)

Phone: 020 7017 8910

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

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

Information, support and representation for UK-based Africans living with or affected by HIV and other health conditions

### TB Alert

Information line: 01273 234770

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

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

Support and advice for people concerned about TB or TB-HIV co-infection

### TB Action Group (TBAG)

Phone: 01273 234770

<http://tbactiongroup.ning.com>

A peer support and advocacy group for people affected by TB or TB-HIV co-infection

### NHS Choices

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

Information about TB and HIV, and a service finder

### THT Direct

Helpline: 0845 1221 200

Email: [info@tht.org.uk](mailto:info@tht.org.uk)

HIV support, advice and service information provided by the Terence Higgins Trust

### African AIDS Helpline

Helpline: 0800 0967 500

Information and advice on HIV and sexual health for African people living in the UK

### NAM

[www.aidsmap.com](http://www.aidsmap.com)

Information on HIV, TB-HIV co-infection, and the treatment of both conditions; and an HIV and TB service finder

### HIV i-Base

[www.i-base.info](http://www.i-base.info)

Helpline: 0808 800 6013

Information on HIV and HIV treatment

This leaflet was developed in partnership by TB Alert and the African Health Policy Network

