

# FACTS ABOUT TUBERCULOSIS DISEASE



Central  
Health

## 1. What is active, infectious tuberculosis (TB) disease?

Active, infectious TB disease is caused by germs (bacteria) that are spread through the air from person to person. If someone has active TB disease of the lungs or airways, the TB germs may spread to others by coughing, sneezing, singing, playing a wind instrument or sometimes even just talking. Active TB is most infectious when the TB germs are found in the person's sputum (phlegm).

## 2. What happens if I have active, infectious TB disease?

If you have active, infectious TB disease you may experience the following symptoms:

- Cough lasting longer than three weeks
- Chest pain
- Coughing up blood
- Weakness or fatigue
- Weight loss
- Lack of appetite
- Chills
- Fever
- Night sweats

If hospitalization is required, you may be kept in a special isolation room to protect other patients and health care workers from becoming infected. You will be asked to wear a mask if you have to leave your room, and health care workers will wear masks to protect themselves while caring for you. These precautions are usually stopped when you start to feel better.

## 3. Why do I have to take TB drugs for so long?

Treatment of active TB disease takes at least six to nine months. The antibiotics used to kill the TB germs only work when the germs grow, which happens very slowly.

## 4. What if I don't take all my TB drugs?

You will likely start feeling better after only a few weeks of taking TB drugs. However, it is important to keep taking the drugs because the TB germs are still alive in your body. If you stop taking the drugs, or don't take them regularly, drug-resistant TB may develop. You will then get sick all over again and will need to take drugs longer to be cured, which may cause more side effects. You may also get active, infectious TB disease again and spread the disease to your family, friends and coworkers.

## 5. What happens to my friends and family if I have active, infectious TB disease?

Because you may have spread TB germs to others without knowing it, health care workers will speak with you to find out who you spend time with every day. This is called *contact tracing*. Your family, friends and coworkers may be contacted and tested to find out if they have been infected. Contact tracing helps stop the spread of TB.

