

Tuberculosis

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Tuberculosis (TB) is an infectious disease usually caused by a specific bacteria. TB typically affects the lungs, but can also affect other body parts. It is possible to carry the TB bacteria, without r have any symptoms of having TB.

Symptoms

The classic symptoms of TB are:

- ❖ Chronic cough
- ❖ Blood in the sputum
- ❖ Fever
- ❖ Night sweats
- ❖ Weight loss
- ❖ Fatigue

If you or someone that you know presents with these symptoms, it is extremely important to isolate the person and take them to a clinic as soon as possible.

Transmission

TB spreads through the air when people who is infected with the bacteria in their lungs cough, spit, speak, or sneeze. People in close contact to someone with TB thus have a high risk to get TB. People with HIV, chronic diseases (diabetes, alcoholism) and those who smoke are also at an increased risk of being infected. Other risk factors include: overcrowding and malnutrition, which is both common in poverty.

Common Scenario

One of the most common causes of death in South Africa is when a person are infected with HIV and their immune system are so low that they cannot fight a TB infection when they get infected. The TB then kills the patient due to their lowered immune system.

Prevention

Early detection of TB are extremely important for effective treatment thereof. Screening of people that have/had contact with someone who has TB can help with this. Vaccination of high risk groups with the BCG vaccine can also reduce it's incidence.



Diagnosis

TB is diagnosed with the help of chest X-rays, the examining of body fluids (such as sputum) under a microscope and the TB skin test.

Treatment

TB can be treated with various medications that can be prescribed by a doctor. The best outcome of TB treatment are when the disease are picked up early and treatment are started early. This is why it is extremely important to see a doctor as soon as possible if you are in contact with someone who has TB or if you have symptoms of TB (as mentioned above).

It is also extremely important to use your medication until the very last pill and not until you feel better. If you stop your treatment early, it can result in the recurrence of the TB infection and the development of TB that is resistant to medication. Resistant TB are extremely dangerous, because it is very difficult to treat.

Stigma

Stigma may result in people treating TB patients differently. It is however extremely important to support people with TB and not push them out of a community. It is not the person's fault that they have TB, any person can get TB.

TB stigma often result in delays in seeking treatment and lower treatment compliance. In these situations it is extremely important to put your health and your healing above anything that anyone might say. Comply to your treatment and your doctor's advice and try and ignore other people's comments, because it is not worth dying due to other people's opinions.

If you would like more information on TB or support you can speak to the social worker at any clinic or hospital.

