

## What are the medicines?

- Initial treatment for TB disease requires 4-5 different medicines daily.
- The most common TB medicines are Isoniazid, Rifampin, Ethambutol and Pyrazinamide. Vitamin B6 may also be prescribed to decrease side effects.
- In Ontario, TB medicines are free. Ask your doctor about obtaining free TB medicine from the local public health department.

## What are the side effects of TB medicines?

All medicines may cause unwanted side effects. In most cases, these are not serious. **If you develop any of the following side effects, you should report them to your doctor immediately.**

### ***Isoniazid (INH) – [pills or liquid]***

Yellow eyes and skin, dark urine, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, and abdominal pain. Numbness, tingling or burning of hands and feet. Acne, fever, fatigue, rash or itch.

**NOTE:** INH interacts with the same medicines used to control epilepsy, e.g., Dilantin.

### ***Rifampin (RMP) – [capsules or liquid]***

Yellow eyes and skin, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain. **Note:** Tears, urine and stool normally will turn orange while taking Rifampin. Rifampin decreases the effectiveness of birth control pills, blood thinners and medicines for diabetes – discuss this with your doctor. Contact lenses can possibly be stained.

### ***Ethambutol (EMB) - [pills]***

Blurred vision, loss of colour vision.

### ***Pyrazinamide (PZA) – [pills]***

Yellow eyes and skin, dark urine, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting and abdominal or joint pain.

Skin rashes or fever may occur with any of these drugs.

## How does TB affect other parts of the body?

About one in five cases of tuberculosis occurs in parts of the body other than the lungs. The TB germs can move to the lymph nodes through the lymph system and from there are able to enter other parts of the body through the bloodstream. The most common places outside the lungs are the bones, lymph nodes, kidneys and brain. Your doctor may test other parts of your body to make sure that you do not have TB. When TB is in these other locations, it cannot be transmitted to other people.

**Tuberculosis is preventable,  
treatable and curable.**

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> TB still exists.

It is important to understand  
the disease, learn how it is  
treated and what to do if  
you or someone you know  
develops TB.

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## **What is Tuberculosis?**

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by a germ called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*.

The germ enters the body through the air you breathe and causes an infection, usually in the lungs. Sometimes the infection can happen in other parts of the body.

When the germ is dormant or asleep, people do not have active TB disease. This is called latent tuberculosis infection. These germs are not making you sick at this time and you cannot pass these germs to other people.

Active TB disease occurs when germs multiply, causing damage to the lungs or other parts of the body, like the brain, lymph nodes, or kidneys. People with active TB disease may pass the germs to other people.

## **How do people get TB?**

When a person with active TB disease of the lungs coughs, sneezes or talks, the TB germs travel from their lungs into the air. Other people can breathe in these germs.

Only people with active TB disease of the lungs or throat can spread the germs. People with latent TB infection or TB disease in other parts of the body cannot spread the germs.

TB is most often spread to people who spend a lot of time with a person who has active TB disease in their lungs. People most at risk are those living in the same house or

going to school or working with someone who has active TB disease.

People can develop active TB disease many years after they first breathed in the TB germs. This usually happens when a person becomes run down or grows older.

## **What are the signs or symptoms of active TB disease?**

- Cough for two to three weeks or longer
- Fever
- Loss of energy
- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss
- Night sweats

Because these symptoms may be confused with other illnesses, it is best to see a doctor. Some people may not have symptoms.

## **How can I tell if the TB germ has infected me?**

A tuberculosis skin test can tell whether TB germs are in your body.

A doctor or nurse will inject a tiny amount of liquid, *tuberculin*, just under the skin on your arm. It is not a vaccination and cannot cause TB. Two to three days later you must return to the doctor or nurse who will check your arm and look for a bump.

The doctor or nurse measures the bump. Only a bump (reaction) over a certain size will be considered positive.

Your doctor will work with the public health department to treat the active TB disease or latent TB infection.

## **What does a positive TB test mean?**

A positive skin test usually means that you have been infected with the TB germ sometime in the past.

Your doctor will do further tests, such as a chest x-ray and collection of sputum (phlegm), to see if you have active TB disease.

## **How is latent TB infection treated?**

- Your doctor will recommend what preventative treatment is best for you.
- Your doctor may prescribe special TB medicine to get rid of the TB germs. Taking this medicine will prevent the germs from causing active TB disease in the future.
- This medicine needs to be taken for several months.

## **How is active TB disease treated?**

- Active TB disease must be treated with special TB medicines that are prescribed by a doctor with experience in treating TB.
- Treatment for TB disease is different for each person and takes many months.
- Your doctor will tell you when it is time to stop taking the medicines.
- It is important to keep taking the medicines even if you are feeling better. Feeling well does not mean that the disease is completely gone.