Tuberculosis (TB)

What is tuberculosis?
TB is a disease that is caused by becoming infected with Tubercle bacilli germs. These germs are transmitted through the air by a person with active TB.

What is the difference between active TB disease and inactive latent TB infection (LTBI)?
Active TB: A person with active TB is someone who has been infected with the TB bacteria. The bacteria has reproduced and attacks the body, usually the lungs.

Inactive Latent TB Infection: A person is likely to have inactive latent TB infection if they have a positive skin test, a normal chest x-ray, and no symptoms of active TB. Persons with unrelated inactive TB may develop active TB even many years later.

How is TB spread?
The TB germ is spread only from a person with untreated active TB by tiny droplets from the nose, mouth, lung or lymph fluid. Someone who shares close breathing space with the infected person over a period of time can then inhale these germs.

What are the symptoms of TB?
The most common symptoms of TB are persistent cough, fatigue, loss of appetite, unintentional weight loss, fever, chills, night sweats, coughing up blood, shortness of breath, and chest pain.

Who can get TB?
Anyone can get TB. You have a greater chance of getting TB if you:
- Are infected with HIV
- Live or spend time in close contact with a person who has active TB
- Have certain medical conditions (diabetes, silicosis, blood disorders, cancer, renal failure, and certain gastrointestinal disorders)
- Have suppressed immune system (either from steroid medicine or from disease)
- Use IV drugs
- Are addicted to alcohol
- Are 10 percent below ideal body weight
- Are from a country with a high TB rate
- Are or have been a resident or employee of a correctional facility, nursing home, or mental institution
- Are working or studying in the health care field
- Are or have been migrant, homeless, medically under-served, or from a low income background
- Have recently converted from a negative to a positive TB skin test
- Have an abnormal chest x-ray

How is TB diagnosed?
A TB skin test is the only way to find out if a person has TB infection.

How often should I be tested?
Persons listed in the high-risk groups previously mentioned should undergo annual TB screening (with the exception of those from countries with high rates of TB).

What is the treatment for TB?
Certain specialized antibiotics are prescribed for the treatment of active TB disease and Latent TB Infection (LTBI). The specific course of therapy and follow-up will be determined by a health-care professional. Treatment for active TB is required by public health law due to the seriousness and contagiousness of the disease. It is very important that any person deemed to have LTBI also consider treatment with antibiotics. Taking this medication can prevent the person with LTBI from developing active TB.

Student Health Center
Special Programs Building
28 Westhampton Way
University of Richmond, VA 23173

Phone (804) 289-8064
Dial-A-Nurse (804) 289-8700
Fax (804) 287-6466

wellness.richmond.edu