

Some people can use another member of their community to observe their treatment. This could mean an employer, a colleague, or a community health worker. They will need to be familiar with TB and should understand why it's so important that you take your medication correctly. The person who is observing your treatment will give you your pills, watch you swallow them, and sign a card confirming that you took your dose. You will need to show this card to your doctor or another staff person at the clinic when you return for a check-up.

Can tuberculosis be prevented?

The South African Department of Health is still looking into ways to prevent tuberculosis in HIV-positive people. Some studies have shown that TB can be prevented in people who have been exposed to the bacteria that causes it. However, it has not yet been determined how best to test these patients or provide preventative treatment to them.

Pneumocystis Carinii Pneumonia (PCP)

What is it?

Pneumocystis carinii pneumonia, or PCP, is a life-threatening lung disease caused by an organism called *Pneumocystis carinii*. This organism can also infect and cause disease in other organs, including the skin.

Pneumocystis carinii is abundant in the environment. Most healthy people have antibodies to fight this organism every time it enters the body. However, in people with compromised immune systems, such as people with AIDS, antibody responses to *Pneumocystis carinii* fade, rendering them susceptible to PCP.

During the early years of the AIDS epidemic, PCP occurred in more than 80% of people living with HIV. It was also highly fatal. However, drugs to prevent PCP have drastically decreased these rates and are now recommended for all people in the second, third, and fourth stages of HIV disease.

PCP is preventable.

What are the symptoms of PCP?

Fever is a main symptom of PCP, along with a dry cough that doesn't produce any phlegm (sputum). Other chief symptoms include chest tightness and difficulty breathing. Fatigue and night sweats can also occur, often before breathing difficulties appear. These are also symptoms of other types of infections, thus it is important to diagnose PCP carefully.

How is PCP diagnosed?

There is no blood test to determine if PCP is present in the body. To diagnose PCP, phlegm (sputum) from the lungs is collected by a doctor and examined by a laboratory under a microscope. While X-rays can be used to determine how much fluid has collected in the lungs, they can't tell the difference between PCP and other lung infections like tuberculosis.

How is PCP treated?

The most effective treatment for PCP is a combination of two drugs: trimethoprim and sulfamethoxazole. The simple generic name for this drug is co-trimoxazole. Dosages for both drugs are lower today than they were ten years ago. At the same time, the drug can be taken either by mouth in pill form or by intravenous (IV) infusion.

To treat PCP, co-trimoxazole must be taken every day for two or three weeks. After