



get tested for **TB**  
**it can be**  
**CURED**



*I had TB.  
I got tested  
and treated.  
Now I am  
cured.*

Fikile Boyce

## ***What is TB***

Tuberculosis (known as TB) is a disease caused by a germ called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. TB has infected millions of people throughout the world for thousands of years. People who have healthy immune systems usually do not get sick with TB even if the TB germs are in their bodies.

TB makes people sick when their bodies are not healthy enough to fight the TB germs. When the immune system is weak, the TB germs multiply in the body. This is called *active TB*.

Active TB is a very serious disease that can kill you.

## ***TB passes from one person to the other through the air***

Most active TB develops in the lungs. This is called *Pulmonary TB*. When someone sick with TB coughs or sneezes, the TB germs are released into the air. The germs can stay in the air for a long time, especially if the area is crowded, damp or has poor air. A nearby person can get infected with TB by breathing some of these germs into their lungs. Most of the TB germs stay in the lungs, although sometimes it will grow in other parts of the body. TB that grows outside of the lungs is called *Extra-pulmonary TB*.

## **South Africa has a large and deadly TB epidemic**

More people die of TB than any other disease in South Africa.

There are many reasons why this is happening: lack of housing, malnutrition, alcoholism and our weak health system all increase the risk of getting active TB.

**However, the main cause of TB deaths growing so rapidly is the HIV epidemic.**

HIV weakens the immune system so people are less able to fight the TB germs. Although people with HIV are at higher risk, anyone can get sick from TB.

### **Get Tested!**

It is important to get tested for TB if you are HIV-positive or you have a cough. The main way of testing for TB is by taking sputum (a gob of mucus from the throat) and testing it for TB germs at a medical clinic.

The test will come back *smear-negative* or *smear-positive*.

A smear-positive test means that there is a TB infection in your lungs and that you must start treatment immediately.

A smear-negative test means that you might not have TB. However, many HIV-positive people test smear-negative, yet they still have active TB.

If you are HIV-positive and have TB symptoms but a smear-negative TB test result, there are other checks your clinic can do to see if you really have active TB. A chest x-ray can help diagnose you. Also, you can have what is called a TB culture test, but this takes several weeks to give a result.

### **TB can be cured**

Medicines can cure TB. If you have TB, it is important that you take your medicines properly. If you have been treated before, have HIV, are pregnant or are taking contraceptives, you must tell your doctor as the medicines will be different for you.

If you have TB, you should get tested for HIV. If you have HIV, you should be regularly checked for TB.

## **Symptoms of TB**

### **Pulmonary TB**

Coughing for two weeks or more  
Coughing up thick liquid or blood  
Chills, fever and night sweats  
Weight loss and loss of appetite  
Chest pain or problems breathing

### **Extra-pulmonary TB**

Pain or swelling of your tummy  
Pain or blood when you pee  
Fever, nausea  
Aches and pains in spine or joints  
Reproductive problems

**Drug resistant TB** is a very serious problem in South Africa. Drug resistance is when a person gets a strain of the TB germs that the main TB medicines do not work against. It is one of the major reasons TB is a big crisis. It is hard to treat drug resistant TB but not impossible. Drug resistant TB can be overcome if

- (1) people at risk of TB are tested regularly,
- (2) people with active TB are given the right medicines and
- (3) people taking TB medicines take the full course properly.

## ***We can all prevent TB***

There are simple things everyone can do to prevent the spread of TB:

- **Get tested for TB** if you have any symptoms, especially if you have a cough or you are losing weight.
- If you are **HIV-positive**, regularly ask your clinic to **check if you have TB**.
- **Cover your mouth** when you sneeze or cough.
- If someone near you is coughing, **look the other way and cover your mouth**.
- If you have TB, **take your medicines properly**.
- **Open windows**, especially in crowded rooms and taxis.



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