



# TB and HIV

get tested  
for HIV  
and TB

# WHAT IS TB?

Tuberculosis (commonly known as TB) is a disease caused by a germ called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. TB is the number one cause of death in South Africa. It spreads through the air from one person to another and is therefore highly infectious.

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.

# HOW DO YOU GET TB?

When someone who is sick with TB coughs or sneezes, the TB germs are released into the air and this is how it passes from one person to the other. The germs can stay in the air for a long time, especially if the area is crowded, damp or has poor ventilation. If you are close to an infected person you can get infected with TB by breathing some of these germs into your lungs. The bacteria can attack any part of your body, but it usually attacks the lungs. We call this pulmonary TB. TB that grows outside of the lungs, in other parts of the body, is called extrapulmonary TB.

# TB AND HIV

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

HIV weakens the immune system so people with HIV are less able to fight the TB germs.

This is why the number of people who are co-infected with both HIV and TB is so high. But while people with HIV are at higher risk, anyone can get sick from TB.

## GET TESTED FOR TB

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It is important to get tested for TB if you are HIV positive or if you have any of the symptoms, such as coughing, weight loss or chest pains. The main way to test for TB is by taking a sputum sample (a gob of mucus from the throat) and testing it for TB germs.

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 but you will need further testing

to be absolutely sure. Many HIV positive people test smear-negative, yet they still have active TB. This is because it is difficult to identify active TB in HIV-positive people using the smear test.

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 do have active TB. These include taking a chest x-ray, having a TB culture test or having a test using the GeneXpert machine.



# TB SYMPTOMS

The GeneXpert is a new machine that is being rolled out to health facilities all over the country. The machine has a higher success rate in detecting active TB in people who are HIV positive than the smear test. It can also be used to identify people with drug-resistant TB and it can return a test result within hours. Unfortunately, there are only 30 machines available in South Africa. We hope that in the near future every hospital and clinic will have a GeneXpert.

## **Pulmonary TB (TB of the lung):**

- Coughing for 2 weeks or more
- Coughing up thick liquid or blood
- Chills, fever and night sweats
- Weight loss and loss of appetite
- Chest pain or difficulty breathing

## **Extrapulmonary TB (TB germs are attacking other parts of the body)**

- Pain or swelling of your stomach
- Pain or blood when you urinate
- Fever and nausea
- Aches and pains in your spine or joints
- Reproductive problems

## TB CAN BE CURED

Medicines can cure TB. TB usually requires 6 months of treatment. It is important to keep taking your medicines for the full 6 months, even if you feel better. If you stop too soon you may become sick again or develop drug-resistant TB, which is far more difficult to treat. Even though the side effects of TB treatment can be bad, the consequences of not taking the drugs are likely to be much worse.

If you have been treated for TB before, have HIV, are pregnant or are taking oral contraceptives, you must tell your doctor because you will be given different medicines.

## DRUG-RESISTANT TB

In most cases, if you take your TB medicines for the full 6 months as prescribed, the TB will be cured. However, if you do not take the medicines as required, or the clinic runs out of drugs, or you stop taking them because of side effects, the TB in your body might become drug resistant and the drugs might no longer work. However, it also happens that people become infected with TB that is already drug resistant. Drug-resistant TB is very hard to treat, is expensive and has very bad side-effects. However, drug-resistant TB is not a death sentence and if you adhere to your treatment for the full course (up to 2 years) it can be treated.

# WE CAN ALL PREVENT TB!

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

TB spreads very quickly in spaces where a lot of people gather and where ventilation is poor, such as in taxis and other crowded spaces. TB is killed rapidly by exposure to direct sunlight. It is therefore important to open windows and ventilate rooms.

If someone near you is coughing, look the other way and cover your mouth.

Cover your mouth when you sneeze or cough.

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.

If you have TB, take your medicines on time and complete the course.

Know your status  
and get the right  
treatment to protect  
your health!

Take your  
medicines on time  
every day

Encourage  
others to get  
tested!



[www.tac.org.za](http://www.tac.org.za)  
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get tested for HIV