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## What is Tuberculosis?

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Tuberculosis (also known as TB) is an infectious disease. It usually infects the lungs, but can attack almost any part of the body. It is very common worldwide but is not often seen in Scotland.

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## How does it spread?

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There are different types of TB but usually only people with lung TB are infectious.

Coughing or sneezing throws out droplets containing TB bacteria. A person needs to breathe in these droplets for a long period of time to become infected. Symptoms can take anything from 2-3 months to 60 years to appear.

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## Who is at risk?

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Anyone can get TB, but some groups such as the very young and old are more likely than others to get TB.

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## What are the symptoms of TB?

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These will vary from person to person and which part of the body is infected. They will include the following:

- ❖ A cough lasting more than 2 weeks
- ❖ Coughing up blood or sputum (phlegm from deep inside the lungs)
- ❖ Chest pain
- ❖ Weakness or tiredness
- ❖ Weight loss
- ❖ Chills, fever, and night sweats
- ❖ Lumps in neck or joint swelling

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## Can it be prevented?

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Only children with high risk factors for TB are usually offered a vaccination against TB, called the BCG. This is usually given in the first few weeks after birth. In most cases, the infection is kept in check by the body's immune system.

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## How is it detected?

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One way to diagnose lung TB is by examining the phlegm under a microscope. A skin test (mantoux) can be done to see if a person has been exposed to TB in the past. A chest x-ray can also be helpful. Rarely a blood test may be offered.

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## How is it treated?

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In most cases, TB disease can be cured with anti-TB drugs. To work, the drugs must be taken exactly as prescribed. TB bacteria die very slowly. Medication must be taken for 6 months or longer.

## What if I am a contact of someone with TB?

Only close contacts need to be seen. Close contacts are those who usually live with someone with TB or spend a lot of time with them. They will be informed and may be offered screening. This can include a skin/blood test and/or a chest X-ray.

It is unusual to find TB in others, even close contacts.

Close contacts of TB can continue to attend work or school if well.

### **Need further advice or information?**

- ❖ NHS Inform [www.nhsinform.co.uk](http://www.nhsinform.co.uk)
- ❖ NHS24 ☎ 111 [www.nhs24.co.uk](http://www.nhs24.co.uk)
- ❖ [www.nhsborders.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsborders.scot.nhs.uk)
- ❖ Local health clinic or GP

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