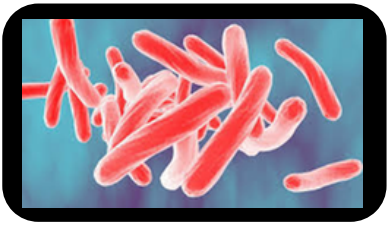
The Hidden Germ: Tuberculosis and Latent TB Infection

Mycobacterium tuberculosis



Tuberculosis (TB) is a bacterial disease that spreads from person to person.

According to the WHO's (World Health Organization) 2024 report -- Tuberculosis is the leading cause of death worldwide.

There are two forms of the disease:

- **Active TB Disease**
- **Latent TB Infection**

Active TB disease:

- The germs are multiplying in the body.
- A person feels sick (Cough that lasts 3 weeks or longer, fever, weight loss, night sweats).
- TB can spread from one person to another through the air and remain in the air for hours.

Latent TB Infection

- Latent means there are a small number of TB germs in a person's body, but they aren't making the person sick right now.
- The bacteria are inactive but are still in the body.
- The person has no symptoms, feels healthy, and cannot spread TB to others.
- LTBI can become active TB disease in the future if not treated.

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SOURCES: CDC, WISCONSIN DEPT. OF HEALTH, NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MEDICINE NIH

Tuberculosis and Latent TB Infection

Important Fact

TB germs are spread through the air when a person with active TB disease in their lungs or throat:

- Coughs
- Speaks
- Laughs
- Sings

If another person breathes in those germs, they might get infected.

Actual TB x-ray

Who is at High Risk?

- People living with HIV or other immune conditions.
- People born in or frequently travel to countries where TB is common.
- People in crowded living conditions. (shelters, prisons, group homes)
- Close contacts of someone with active TB.
- People who use or inject drugs.

Signs and Symptoms

- Cough that lasts over 3 weeks
- Coughing up blood
- Fever, night sweats, fatigue
- Unexplained weight loss, loss of appetite,
- Chest pain

See a healthcare provider right away if you have any of these symptoms.

How to prevent TB and LTBI

- Get Tested
- Take treatment for inactive TB
- Cover Your Mouth when coughing
- Maintain a Healthy Lifestyle

Remember- TB is preventable and treatable

Sources: CDC, Wisconsin Dept. of Health, National Library of Medicine NIH