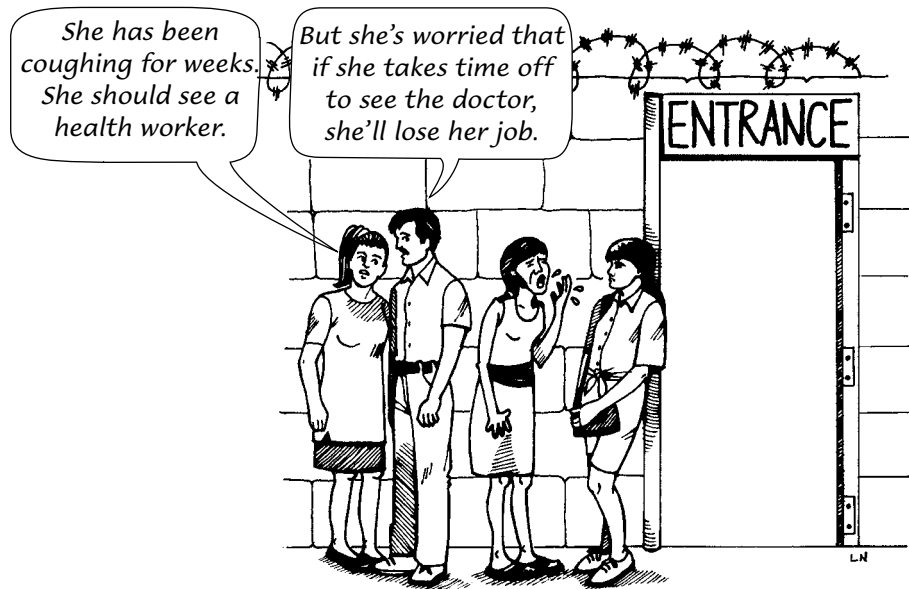


# 31 TB (tuberculosis)



Tuberculosis (TB) is a dangerous infection, usually in the lungs, that can be treated with medicine and cured. Without medicine, TB slowly destroys the lungs and causes death. Many countries have public health programs that provide free testing and free medicines for TB.

When someone who has TB coughs or sneezes, they spread TB germs into the air. Other people who breathe in the germs can get infected with TB, especially if they share a closed space with an infected person for weeks or months. Overcrowding and poor ventilation in factories, dormitories, and boarding houses help spread TB. Factories should have a TB policy that:

- recognizes that TB is a workplace issue, educates management and workers about TB, and prohibits discrimination against workers with TB.
- provides free, confidential, on-site TB testing and treatment or has clear guidelines that allow workers paid time off to be tested and treated, and to have time to recover before returning to work.
- changes conditions to stop TB from spreading at work and in dormitories, by improving ventilation and relieving overcrowding.



TB can spread rapidly when people live in crowded dormitories with poor ventilation.

## Preventing TB at work

A factory that has good ventilation can help prevent TB from spreading. And if factory workers live in dormitories, it is just as important that those buildings have good ventilation systems too.

Workers who breathe in a lot of dust are more likely to get TB. Dust irritates the lungs and makes them less able to resist TB infection. Smoking tobacco also irritates and weakens the lungs.

People who are sick or do not get enough food or rest are also more likely to get TB because their bodies are already weak. This is especially true for people with HIV, who should be tested for TB even if they have no signs. People with TB should also consider getting an HIV test.

When workers in a factory have TB, other people in the community usually have TB also. If anyone in your factory has signs of TB, or if people in your family and community have TB, unions, local organizations, health promoters, and clinics can work together to create a testing, treatment, and prevention program. Educating everyone in the factory, both workers and management, to know the signs of TB and where to get medicines and support is important for prevention.

## Support for people with TB

The factory is healthier for all when every worker with TB gets medicine. In some places, the government health agency will send health workers to a factory to talk with workers, begin testing, and give TB medicine to each worker with TB until she is cured. Social service agencies often help people with TB by offering free transportation to get health care, food support, and compensation for loss of pay due to illness. Make sure the factory TB program is linked to TB programs in the community, and that all workers know about the services that are available.

## TB medicines cure and prevent sickness

A person with TB who takes medicine regularly will begin to get better and not pass TB germs to others. This is why it is very important to start taking TB medicines as soon as you know you have TB. In most countries, government health services do not charge for TB testing or medicine. Many other organizations offer free testing and treatment, too.

If you have any of these signs of illness, see a health worker right away to find out if you need medicines for TB.

## Signs of TB

- A cough that lasts longer than 3 weeks.
- Coughing up mucus with blood in it.
- Slight fever in the evening and sweating at night.
- Chest pain and shortness of breath.
- Weight loss and weakness.



**Always cover your mouth and nose with a cloth when you cough or sneeze to keep germs out of the air.**

## TB tests

There are 3 types of tests for TB.

- For the **skin test**, a small amount of liquid is injected under the skin on the arm. If the person has TB, a raised patch of skin will appear within 1 to 3 days.
- For the **sputum test**, the health worker will ask you to cough hard so that you cough out some mucus. This mucus, called sputum, is then tested in a laboratory to see if it contains TB germs. Usually you will do 3 sputum tests. If 2 tests show you have TB germs, you will need medicines.
- If it is not clear if you have TB, a health worker might take a chest x-ray to look for TB in your lungs.

If the TB tests are negative but you still have the signs of TB, see a health worker trained in treating lung problems. You might have silicosis, pneumonia, asthma, or another lung disease.

## Medicines for TB

The medicines for TB vary from country to country, but treatment everywhere lasts at least 6 months. Usually a person must take 4 medicines (isoniazid, rifampicin, pyrazinamide, and ethambutol) for 2 months, and then just 2 medicines (isoniazid and rifampicin) for 4 more months. It takes that much time and that many medicines to kill the TB germs inside your body.

It is important to take the medicine for the entire time needed, 6 to 12 months or more. You will start feeling better after a few weeks and may think you are cured, but stopping the medicines early is very dangerous. If all the germs have not been killed, you will still be able to infect others and you, your family, and your co-workers can get sick with a kind of TB that is very hard to cure, called MDR (multi-drug resistant) TB.

If you are taking TB medicines but are not feeling better, you may have MDR-TB and need different medicines to be cured. See a health worker.

After a person starts to feel better from taking TB medicines, it is very important for family, friends, and co-workers to support her through all the months of treatment. Help her to remember to take her TB medicines every day.

