



## WHAT ARE THE VARIOUS SYMPTOMS OF TB THAT PEOPLE NEED TO LOOK OUT FOR



## TB- Know it, prevent it

Over the past 16 years, the Tuberculosis (TB) incidence rate in Singapore has remained between 30 and 40 per 100,000 persons. Given that TB was prevalent in Singapore before the 1960s, there is still a sizeable number of older people in Singapore with Latent TB infection. They can potentially develop Active TB disease when their immunity wanes, posing a risk of transmission in the community. This is especially pertinent in Singapore with its ageing population.

The National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID) would like to take this opportunity to educate the public and create awareness on TB so that they will be vigilant, and will take preventive steps to safeguard their health and of those around them.

Read on to learn more about Uncle Tan's experience with TB and his concerns regarding the infectious disease.

I am in my early sixties and was recently diagnosed with Pulmonary Tuberculosis (TB). I have just started taking medications for TB. Before seeing a doctor, I was coughing for about three months but had brushed it off as the "100-days cough". It was only when I found blood in my phlegm that I decided to consult a doctor.

When I was diagnosed with TB, my wife and I were very surprised as to how I could have contracted the disease since I was given the Bacillus Calmette-Guérin (BCG) vaccination as a baby. As we stay under the same roof with my eldest son, his wife and their two-year-old son, we are very worried that they will also contract TB. I am also concerned about the long-term costs of my TB treatment as I will need to take the medications and go for follow-ups with the doctor for six months. I would like to find out more about TB.

### Q&A on TB (responses attributed to Dr Tay Jun Yang, Associate Consultant from the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID))

#### 1. How does TB spread, and are my family members within the same household at higher risk of contracting TB?

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease that primarily affects the lungs.

It spreads through close and prolonged contact with a person who has infectious TB, TB affecting the lungs (pulmonary) or voice box (larynx) is infectious and it can spread when the infected person coughs, sneezes or speaks. Hence, people living in the same household or are in frequent, close contact with the affected person are at higher risk of being exposed to TB and getting infected.

Children below the age of five, and persons with weakened immune systems, are also at increased risk of developing TB.

#### 2. What precautions should I take to minimise the risk to my family members?

#### 3. Where do I go if I want to be screened for TB? What is the TB screening process?

#### 4. What symptoms should I look out for? Can TB be cured?

#### 5. How is TB treatment carried out? Do I really need to go to the clinic and be observed taking my medication every day?

#### 6. Why am I not protected even though I was given the BCG vaccination as a baby?

#### 7. How affordable is TB treatment, and are there any subsidies provided?

#### 8. How should someone with TB take better care? Any specific areas the person should look out for?

#### 9. Can I still go to work even though I have TB?

#### 10. What sort of activities will I be allowed to do? Would I need to make adjustments to my diet?

#### 11. Why is there still TB in Singapore?

#### 12. Where can I find out more information about TB, and who can I contact if I have questions?

#### Lesser known facts about TB

- A person cannot get TB from sharing cups, utensils, and food. TB is also not spread through shaking someone's hand, kissing and contact from toilet seats.
- TB in humans can be traced back to 9,000 years ago in Atili Yam (a city now under the Mediterranean Sea). Archaeologist found tuberculosis in the remains of a mother and child buried together.
- TB was previously known known as "Consumption", "Phthisis (Wasting Disease)" and "The White Plague".
  - TB was known as Consumption and Phthisis due to weight loss associated with the disease. In the 1700s, TB was called "The White Plague" due to patients looking pale. This is a result of anemia from the coughing of blood.

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