



RELATED CONDITIONS

Tuberculosis and the Liver

TUBERCULOSIS (TB for short) is a bacterial infection that anyone can get. In fact, it is estimated that about 1/3 of the population of the world is infected with TB. TB is spread by airborne droplets—mostly occurring when people cough, or sneeze, but can also be spread by talking or even singing. The droplets are carried through the air, breathed in and the bacteria settles in the lungs. There are three stages of TB—in the first stage of infection (called primary infection) people may or may not have symptoms. The primary infection lasts 2-10 weeks. At this stage the infection will travel throughout the body and infect other parts of the body. After the primary infection stage TB will pass into the a stage called the latent stage—about 90% (9 out of 10 people) will no longer be infectious and have no other problems with TB for the rest of their lives and they can't spread TB.

For about 10% of people in the latent stage, TB will become active and infectious—this is the stage that can cause serious health problems throughout the body and could cause death. This is called TB disease. In people with HIV and certain other medical conditions the risk of developing long-term infection is much greater.

The symptoms of TB include cough, weight loss and fever.

If you believe you have been exposed to TB disease you should be tested. The initial test is a skin or a blood test. If it turns out you have TB talk to your medical provider about next steps and treatment.

There are effective drugs to treat TB. Usually people will be treated with a combination of drugs for 6 to 12 months. Since the TB drugs are processed by the liver your doctor will monitor the liver while on treatment. Probably the most important thing to remember is that a person taking TB medications needs to be sure to take all the medications. This is important because too many missed doses or stopping early can make the TB disease worse. Another problem is that stopping early or missing doses could make TB disease 'resistant' to the same TB medications—making it very expensive and difficult to treat.

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