

Tuberculosis (TB) in Children



What is tuberculosis in children?

Tuberculosis (TB) is an ongoing (chronic) infection caused by bacteria.

It usually infects the lungs, but other organs such as the kidneys, spine, or brain may be affected.

TB is most often spread through droplets breathed or coughed into the air.

A child can be infected with the TB bacteria and not have active disease.

What causes TB in a child?

TB is caused by bacteria. It's most often caused by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* (*M. tuberculosis*). Many children infected with *M. tuberculosis* never develop active TB and remain in the latent TB stage.

TB bacteria is spread through the air when an infected person coughs, sneezes, speaks, sings, or laughs.

A child usually does not become infected unless he or she has repeated contact with the bacteria. TB is not likely to be spread through personal items, such as clothing, bedding, cups, eating utensils, a toilet, or other items that a person with TB has touched. Good air flow is the most important way to prevent the spread of TB.

A child is more at risk for TB if he or she:

- Lives with someone who has TB
- Is homeless
- Comes from a country where TB is common
- Has a weak immune system

What are the symptoms of TB in a child?

Symptoms can occur a bit differently in each child, and they depend on the child's age. The most common symptoms of active TB in younger children include:

- Fever
- Weight loss
- Poor growth
- Cough
- Swollen glands
- Chills

How is TB treated in a child?

Treatment may include a short-term hospital stay to be treated with medicine.

For latent TB, the child is given a 6- to 12-month course of the medicine isoniazid. Or the child may get a shorter course of another medicine. For active TB, a child may take 3 to 4 medicines for 6 months or more. This is to make sure that the medicine is working.

Children usually start to get better within a few weeks of starting treatment. After 2 weeks of treatment with medicine, a child is usually not contagious. Treatment must be fully finished as prescribed. It is important that your child take all of the medicines for the entire time period.

