

# What is TB?



Tuberculosis (TB) is caused by a bacteria called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. It usually affects the lungs but can also harm any part of the body except nails and hair.

TB spreads easily through the air when a person with active lung TB sneezes, talks, or spits, releasing the germs. Early diagnosis and treatment are important to prevent the spread and to get cured.

**“TB can be cured. In addition to medication, family and social support are crucial to the fight against the disease. A strong supportive community and the support of loved ones can have a significant impact on treatment and recovery outcomes.” – Sailesh Bhujel, Public Health Professional**

## How common is TB?

TB remains the top infectious killer disease globally. In 2023, approximately 10 million people fell ill with TB, and 1.25 million died from the disease, making it the leading cause of death. While TB is more prevalent in low- and middle-income countries, it also affects high-income nations. In the United States, TB cases rose to over 10,300 in 2024, the highest since 2011.

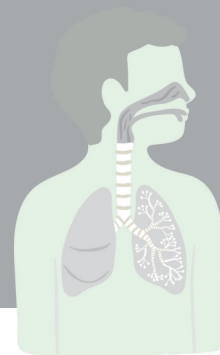
Some conditions put people at greater risk of being exposed to the bacteria or of developing tuberculosis disease. These include:

- Compromised immune systems, such as those living with HIV/AIDS
- Children, especially those under 5 and adults aged 65 and older
- Living in places that are overcrowded or have inadequate ventilation, such as shelters or prisons
- Being malnourished or undernourished
- Being in contact with individuals with active TB
- Individuals who use drugs, alcohol, or tobacco
- Chronic health conditions such as diabetes

Early screening, diagnosis and treatment for these individuals is important for early detection and treatment and to stop the spread of tuberculosis.

## Symptoms of active TB in the lungs may include:

- Persistent cough lasting more than 3 weeks
- Coughing up blood
- Chest pain
- Fever and night sweats
- Unexplained weight loss
- Feeling tired or weak
- Loss of appetite



## How Is TB Treated?

TB is highly curable, if treated appropriately and in time. The typical treatment for active TB usually lasts at least six months. It is critical to fully complete the treatment in order to cure the disease and prevent it from developing resistance to the medications.

## What is latent TB?

Latent TB infection (LTBI) means a person has TB bacteria in their body, but the bacteria are not active. People with LTBI don't feel sick, have no symptoms, and can't spread TB to others. However, the bacteria can become active, especially if their immune system gets weak. To keep LTBI from becoming active, people can be given treatment, which typically lasts three to four months.