

TUBERCULOSIS - TUBERCOLOSI

Tuberculosis, also called TB, is one of the oldest disease known to man.

Today, tuberculosis **is still responsible for over 3 million deaths each year.**

TB is caused by a germ, the *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* germ. This germ frequently affects the lungs, yet, it can also infect the any other organ in our body, such as, the lymph nodes, kidneys, bones, and brain.

HOW IS TB CONTRACTED?

Tuberculosis is transmitted by man, not by insects, nor by blood or water.

A person who has contracted pulmonary tuberculosis (TB of the lungs), can transmit the disease by coughing, sneezing, speaking, singing, or spitting. The germs are expelled by the lungs into the air where they can remain suspended for hours. By breathing in this air, one can become infected.

The highest risk of contagion concerns family members, colleagues at work, or friends of an infected person. However, many who become infected do not become sick, nor do they become contagious, since their immune system “blocks” the tuberculosis germ. Only 5-10% of those infected will become sick during their lives.

However, the risk of developing the disease is much higher, even 30 times higher, in those who are HIV positive.

In addition, **those who are also at a high risk of contagion are those affected by silicosis** (*n.b.* a disease caused by the inhalation of silica particles), kidney failure, diabetes mellitus, excision of the stomach, those **from countries with a high prevalence of tuberculosis** (Africa, south and south-east Asia, the Middle East, South America), alcoholics, and intravenous drug users.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU HAVE BEEN INFECTED

To identify individuals who have been infected, yet, are in good health conditions and do not have symptoms, a Mantoux test is performed. This test involves injecting a substance called tuberculin into the skin of the arm. If there is a positive response to the skin test (Mantoux positive), a chest x-ray must be taken to exclude an active form of TB.

In some, with a positive tuberculin test, preventive therapy can be prescribed using medication, *isoniazide*, even if the x-rays and other tests have a negative result.

Preventive therapy (*isoniazide* for 6-12 months) is useful in reducing the risk of contracting TB.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS TUBERCULOSIS

The symptoms of TB consist in a cough, weight loss, chest pain, fever and night sweats. In the long run, the cough can be accompanied by blood-stained phlegm.

The symptoms described do not always appear as serious conditions, but they are persistent. Therefore, it is recommended that your primary doctor be contacted as soon as possible.

If TB is diagnosed, therapy must be regularly followed and for the length of time prescribed, even if the symptoms disappear after a few weeks from the beginning of therapy. This will ensure more than a 95% possibility of recovery. If not, a relapse can occur, and the therapy may no longer be effective.

HOW TO PREVENT CONTRACTING TUBERCULOSIS

- a) The greatest protection for preventing TB contagion is **conducting a healthy lifestyle**. In fact, TB can be prevented by improving environmental hygienic conditions, avoiding domestic over-crowding, eating foods rich in protein and vitamins, such as milk, meat, fruit and vegetables, and working in suitable hygienic working conditions;
- b) with **immunizations**: to administer to newborns and children younger than 5 years of age, with a negative tuberculin test, who are introduced into a family accommodating individuals who originate from high endemic regions (*n.b.* regions where TB occurs more often) but, above all, to **children who, born in Italy, must visit a medium to high endemic country**;
- c) **finding infected individuals**, using the tuberculin test, and preventing them from becoming sick;
- d) **curing contagious patients** to prevent the sickness from spreading.

If further information is required in reference to tuberculosis, and if a tuberculin skin test is necessary, or if you believe to have contracted TB, contact your nearest Public Health Service.

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For more information contact:
Per saperne di più, rivolgeti a: