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RESPIRATORY HEALTH ASSOCIATION℠
of Metropolitan Chicago

Tuberculosis: Myths v. Facts

Myth: Tuberculosis is hereditary.	**Fact:** Tuberculosis is NOT hereditary. It is a disease that is transmitted from person to person through the air during coughing, sneezing, laughing, singing, shouting, and even talking. When a person coughs or sneezes, the tiny germs enter the air where they can be inhaled by those around them.
Myth: If someone coughs I will automatically develop TB.	**Fact:** TB is not easily caught. You have to be in close contact with someone who has TB for a long time (usually many hours or days). You should be aware of the symptoms of the disease so you can seek treatment as soon as possible.
Myth: Tuberculosis causes lung cancer.	**Fact:** Lung diseases that cause scarring of the lung tissues, such as tuberculosis, can increase the risk of developing lung cancer. There are many causes of lung cancer, with smoking being the number one cause. Radon, asbestos, pollution, and many other materials and chemicals have been known to cause lung cancer.
Myth: Tuberculosis disease and Tuberculosis infection mean the same thing.	**Fact:** There are two types of tuberculosis: *Tuberculosis Disease* and *Tuberculosis Infection*. A person infected with a **tuberculosis infection** is NOT contagious because the germ is inactive or latent. The person does not know he or she is infected because no signs or symptoms are experienced. A person with **tuberculosis disease** is affected quite differently. The person with active tuberculosis disease has the active germ within their body; therefore the person is contagious and may be experiencing signs and symptoms.
Myth: Tuberculosis infection always develops into Tuberculosis Disease.	**Fact:** A tuberculosis *infection* does not always develop into tuberculosis *disease*. People with weakened immune systems, such as the very young and very old, persons with cancer or HIV infection are more likely to develop active disease once infected.
Myth: A positive skin test means I have TB.	**Fact:** A positive TB skin test only confirms that you have been exposed to tuberculosis and are infected, but not necessarily have disease. You need medicine to keep from getting sick.
Myth: If I don't have TB symptoms, I don't have TB.	**Fact:** A person with TB disease may have any, all or none of the following symptoms: a cough that will not go away; feeling tired all the time; weight loss; loss of appetite; fever; coughing up blood; night sweats. These symptoms can also occur with other diseases so it is important to see a doctor and to let the doctor determine if you have TB. It is also important to remember that a person with TB disease may feel perfectly healthy or may only have a cough from time to time. If you think you have been exposed to TB, get a TB skin test.
Myth: Tuberculosis only occurs in lower socioeconomic groups.	**Fact:** Tuberculosis can be contracted by anyone. However, there are some people who are at a greater risk for contracting tuberculosis than others. Learning what these risk factors are, can reduce a person's chances of contracting tuberculosis.
Myth: Only persons with TB disease need antibiotics.	**Fact:** If a person test positive for tuberculosis, the doctor will order a chest x-ray or CT scan. If the chest x-ray is clear (does not indicate), the doctor may prescribe a 6-month to one-year antibiotic medication plan. This will help to prevent the TB infection from developing into TB disease. Medications may include: Isoniazid (INH), Rifampin (RM), Pyrazinamide (PZA), Ethambutol (EMB), vitamin B6 - prescribed for alleviating numbness and tingling in the hands and feet.
Myth: Redness in the test area indicates a positive tuberculosis test result.	**Fact:** 48 to 72 hours after the tuberculosis test is performed, a provider needs to examine the test site to determine if the test site is raised and feels hard to the touch. It is not the redness the provider is looking for; it is the raised bump. If there is a bump, the provider will measure the size of the bump and record the measurement.

Chicago's Lung Health Leader Since 1906

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