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WHAT IS TUBERCULOSIS, OR TB?

Tuberculosis, or TB, is an illness caused by bacteria. TB most commonly affects the lungs, but it is also possible to get TB in other parts of the body. TB can be a dangerous illness if it is not treated, but it is curable when you take your medicines as the doctor says.

TB is treated with medicines, normally for six months but sometimes for longer.

CAN ANYONE GET TB?

Anyone can be infected by TB bacteria, but the bacteria do not easily cause infection. To get infected, you must generally have been in close contact over a long period with someone who has TB.

Most people who are infected do not get ill. Only around 10 per cent of those who are infected get ill. Normally the immune system keeps the bacteria under control, which prevents illness. If you have a strong immune system, you won't usually get ill.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS (SIGNS) OF TB?

This is what often happens in your body if you have TB:

- You have a cough that lasts a long time – for three weeks or more.
- You have no appetite for food, or you get thinner.
- You feel weak and tired.
- You have a fever and feel very hot over some time.
- You sweat a lot at night, so that your pyjamas and bedlinen are wet and need changing.
- You may also have a swelling or lump on your throat, in your armpits or in your groin at the top of your thighs. TB in these lumps does not infect others. Only TB in the lungs can infect others.
- Children can also get TB, but have different symptoms than adults. Children with TB often do not gain weight, eat little, sleep a lot and have less energy. Children with TB seldom have a cough.

Contact your doctor if you have any of these symptoms for more than three weeks.

WHAT CAN I DO IF I OR MY CHILDREN GET ILL?

Go to your general practitioner (GP) if you or your children have symptoms of TB. Persons who have not been long in Norway do not have a GP, so they can go to the emergency clinic. **It is important that you go to the doctor if you have been coughing for a long period.**

HOW DOES TB INFECT PEOPLE?

TB infects people when they breathe in TB bacteria from the air. TB bacteria are spread through the air in small droplets that you cannot see.

These droplets come from the nose or mouth of a person who has infectious TB, and gets into the air when this person coughs, sneezes or talks. The TB bacteria are inside some of these droplets. When someone else breathes in this air, it may contain some droplets with TB bacteria that may enter their lungs.

TB bacteria do not easily cause infection. It is most common for people to get infected by someone they are living with. Only lung TB and a rare form of TB in the gullet can infect others.

It is not possible to be infected by someone who has been taking TB medicines for two to three weeks.

CAN I BE INFECTED WITH TB BY HAVING SEX?

No. TB infects if you breathe in air containing TB bacteria from a person who has pulmonary (lung) TB. When you kiss someone deeply, you share their air, but you have to be with the person for a long time to get infected. TB infection is not passed on by having sex.

CAN I GET TB IN OTHER PARTS OF MY BODY THAN THE LUNGS?

You can get TB in all parts of your body, for example in the lungs, as a lump on your throat, in your bones or your stomach. TB in the lungs is most common. Only TB in the lungs can infect other people.

IS TB TREATMENT EXPENSIVE?

Medicines for TB are provided for free. This means that you do not have to pay. All travels that you take for treatment and check-ups are also free. This applies to travels by bus, car, train, aeroplane or boat. If you are not able to work and are given sick leave when you have TB, you will receive sickness pay. If you have difficult financial questions, you can get advice and help from a social worker.

WHERE DOES TB COME FROM?

TB is an illness that is caused by bacteria. TB bacteria have been around for as long as humans have existed. If you have TB bacteria in your body and your body is not strong, you may get ill. Your body may get weak if you have other illnesses, are very tired, live in overcrowded conditions, or do not have enough food. TB can cause illness in any part of your body. It is most common to get TB in the lungs, but it can also occur as a lump on your throat, in your bones or in your brain – just about everywhere! Only TB in the lungs can infect other people.

WHAT IS LATENT TB?

Having latent TB means being infected with TB bacteria without being ill. People with latent TB have TB bacteria in their bodies. Their immune system keeps the bacteria under control, so that they do not get ill. People who have latent TB are healthy and cannot infect others. Many people have latent TB all through their lives without becoming ill. Only around one in ten people with TB infection in their bodies get ill.

If you have latent TB and your immune system is weakened, you can get ill with TB. What happens then is that the immune system is no longer able to keep the TB bacteria under control. The immune system can be weakened by illness or a lot of stress. If you have latent TB, the doctor may recommend that you take medicines to prevent illness at a later stage. This is called preventive treatment. Preventive treatment is voluntary.

WHAT IS MULTIDRUG-RESISTANT TB?

Multidrug-resistant TB is TB that cannot be treated with the usual anti-TB medicines. TB bacteria can become resistant to different types of antibiotics. Bacteria that are resistant to the anti-TB medicines Rifampicin and Isoniazid are called multidrug resistant.

People who get ill with multidrug-resistant TB bacteria must be treated with several different types of medicine. The treatment takes longer than is the case with normal TB – often up to two years. To prevent TB bacteria from becoming resistant to the medicines, it is important for those who are ill to take their medicine every day throughout the treatment period.

WHAT IS THE DUTY OF CONFIDENTIALITY?

The duty of confidentiality means that you are not allowed to tell other people what someone says to you. All doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers in Norway have a duty of confidentiality. They are not allowed to tell anyone what you say to them, not the police, the Directorate of Immigration, or anyone else. You can therefore put your trust in doctors, nurses and the health service in Norway.

CAN MY CHILDREN GET TB EVEN THOUGH THEY HAVE HAD A BCG VACCINATION?

Yes, children who are vaccinated can get ill if they have spent a long period with a person who is coughing TB bacteria into the air around them. Unfortunately, the vaccine does not give 100 per cent protection. If you have TB, your children will be tested and followed up by the doctor.

CAN I HAVE CHILDREN IF I HAVE TB?

It is recommended that you do not become pregnant while you are receiving treatment for TB. Anti-TB medicines are quite strong, so it is best to wait to become pregnant until you have completed your treatment. If you are pregnant when it is discovered that you are ill, you start on anti-TB medicines and will then be followed up by several specialists. If you are pregnant, it is especially important for you to eat very nutritious food. **If you are a man**, you can father children even though you are taking anti-TB medicines.

DO MANY PEOPLE IN NORWAY TODAY GET TB?

Not many people in Norway today get TB. In recent years around 350 people per year have had TB. Not all of them had TB that could infect others. Many of them were infected in countries other than Norway. Everyone who comes from countries where TB is common and who will stay for at least three months in Norway must be tested for TB. The reason for this is that you have a greater risk of becoming ill if you come from a country where TB is common. If the test shows that you have TB, you will be treated and cured. Asylum seekers take TB tests at the asylum reception centre, and other immigrants take the tests in the municipalities to which they move.

I WASN'T TESTED FOR TB WHEN I ARRIVED IN NORWAY – WHY?

It might be that your municipality did not receive information from the police that you had moved there. You can call the municipal medical officer/public health nurse to arrange an appointment.

MANY PEOPLE THINK THAT HAVING TB IS EMBARRASSING. WHOM CAN I TALK TO?

Many people feel that having TB is embarrassing and are afraid that friends and relatives will keep away from them. Knowledge will help more people to understand that TB is not dangerous and that it is an illness that is curable with treatment. There is no reason to be afraid of people with TB.

Some people get lonely if they have no one to talk to. You can safely speak to your doctor or a nurse about TB. Doctors and nurses have a duty of confidentiality. You can call the TB line at LHL International and talk to someone who has had TB. They also have a duty of confidentiality. The telephone number is 22 79 92 00.

CAN I GET MARRIED IF I HAVE TB?

Yes, you can get married. There are some people who might be afraid of marrying a person who has TB, but this is usually because they do not know enough about it, and are therefore scared. Many do not know that people who have been taking anti-TB medicines for 2–3 weeks cannot infect others.

WHAT CAN I EAT WHEN I HAVE TB?

You can eat completely normal food. It is sensible to eat healthy, nutritious food such as vegetables, fruit, fish and meat, and to take cod liver oil. Eat less salt, sugar and fatty foods. If your appetite is poor, perhaps the following advice may help:

- Eat food that you like.
- Eat little and often.
- Eat fruit or drink fruit juice.
- Eat with other people, especially if your appetite is poor.

You should not drink alcohol when you are taking anti-TB medicines.