

Avoiding Tuberculosis – Learn About the Growing Threat!

Tuberculosis (Tb) is an infectious disease that has plagued mankind for at least 10,000 years. In ancient Greece, physicians called the disease 'phthisis', meaning 'to waste away', thus, describing the classic symptom of tuberculosis, causing the body to become weaker and weaker over time.

Following the introduction of antibiotic treatment after World War II, Tb was considered to be almost entirely eradicated in developed countries of Europe and the Americas in the early 1980s, when a new, devastating disease surfaced – HIV/AIDS! Patients who have become infected with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) express a seriously decreased immune system which is not able to fight the bacterium effectively. Furthermore, in recent years, a new, much more virulent strain of Tb bacteria has surfaced – the result of patients who did not adhere to their six-to-12-to-18-months treatment schedule. The result is that today, Tuberculosis has returned to be a major health risk again – not only for patients who are immuno-suppressed (e.g. HIV-positive patients), but for anybody, who may, for whatever reason, have become more susceptible to less obvious infectious agents, or who lives in an area/location that highly favors the spread of the bacterium.

Although the majority of cases still occur in 'less developed' countries, primarily in (Southern) Africa, and certain areas in Asia, the threat of a worldwide recurrence caused by today's 'jet-set' tourism is very real. In addition, there is a large community of Tb-infected patients who do not express obvious disease symptoms or who are not even sick in any way, yet, they are permanent carriers of the bacterium, caught at some time or another from another infected person. While these 'Tb time bombs' are not of any concern as long as these people remain healthy, any chronic disease or cancer could turn these patients into actively Tb transmitting individuals.

Only a known threat can be prevented – and prevention plays a major role in limiting the spread of this disease as much as possible by avoiding exposure; thus, it is of utmost importance to educate all men and women who are at risk, i.e. everybody, about the causes, development and ways of preventing to become infected with tuberculosis.

This workshop is intended to bring basic knowledge of the threat of tuberculosis to the people who are most likely exposed to the disease in one way or another, in a style that can be understood by every listener.

The workshop outline is as follows:

1. What is Tb – where does it come from?
2. Why is Tb still a threat to mankind?
3. How can I get Tb?
4. There is more than one type of Tb.
5. How do I know that I have Tb?
6. Can my Tb be treated?
7. What do I have to do to **not** infect other people around me?
8. How can I prevent getting Tb?
9. What is (multi-) drug resistant Tb?
10. Can I lead a normal life with Tb?