TUBERCULOSIS AWARENESS

WHAT IS TUBERCULOSIS?

TB is an infectious disease which spreads through the air from person to person when droplet nuclei become airborne. These droplets are expelled from the lungs of a person with active TB through coughing, speaking, or sneezing and are then breathed in the lungs of those around them.

Covering the mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing is an important method of preventing the spread of TB because it keeps droplets from becoming airborne.
Once they are inhaled, the tuberculosis bacteria reach the alveoli (air sacs) of the lungs. If the infection is not treated, it can become active and affect the liver, skin, and other organs of the body.

Usually between two and ten weeks after exposure to TB, the immune system will limit the spread of bacteria and keep the infection from becoming active. However, if the immune system has been weakened for any reason, the bacilli can multiply and spread from the lungs to other parts of the body.

HOW DO YOU GET TB?

Tuberculosis spreads through the air when a person infected with active TB coughs, speaks or sneezes. Generally, it takes more than one exposure to someone with active TB for infection to occur. Most often one must have repeated and prolonged indoor exposure to tuberculosis.

People who are frequently in comparatively crowded, poorly ventilated places are more at risk of contracting TB because they are in an ideal environment for TB bacilli to spread. Some examples of such places are:

Homeless shelters Nursing homes
Correctional facilities Factories
Substance abuse centers Schools
Hospitals

TB INFECTION VS. ACTIVE TB

A tuberculosis infection can be either latent (inactive) or active. If it is latent, the bacilli are present in the body, but the individual will not be contagious and will have no symptoms. Taking a series of preventative drugs can aid the immune system in curing the infection once it has been identified.

Persons with a latent TB infection have about a 10 percent chance of developing active TB in their lifetime. The risk is highest in the first two years after infection, but some risk may remain for decades.

Without treatment a TB infection can become active, which means individuals could become contagious and may show symptoms of TB. These symptoms include:

- Coughing
- Fever
- Fatigue
- Night sweats
- Weight loss

An active TB infection can seem like a regular cold, the flu, or pneumonia. A good indicator of TB infection is a cough that persists for more than three weeks.

Latent TB infections can become active when the immune system becomes weakened. Factors which can weaken the immune system are:

- Stress
- Poor nutrition
- Substance abuse
- Sickness
- HIV (AIDS)

REMEMBER THAT TUBERCULOSIS HAS A LONG INCUBATION PERIOD. IT CAN TAKE MONTHS OR YEARS TO SHOW UP.