WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU BREATHE IN THE TB BACTERIA?

- Most often, the TB bacteria are destroyed by the body's immune system and cause no problems.
- In a small number of people, the bacteria stay in the body. Two things can happen:
  - TB bacteria can survive in the body in a dormant, inactive state for many months or years. The person is not ill and is not infectious to other people. However, they could develop TB later, especially if the body is weakened, for example by another medical problem.
  - When people have 'active' TB they start to suffer the symptoms of the disease and may become infectious to others. For the small number of people who do develop TB disease, it is most likely to happen during the first 5 years after they became infected.

IS THERE ANYONE AT SPECIAL RISK OF TB?

Anyone can get TB, but you are more likely to have been exposed to TB if someone in your household or a close relative or friend has the disease or if you have lived, worked or travelled for long periods in areas where TB is more common. This includes the Indian Subcontinent, Africa, South East Asia and some countries in Eastern Europe.

Some people have a greater chance of becoming ill with TB if exposed to it:

- Children
- Elderly people
- Diabetics
- People on steroids or other medicines which affect the body's defence system
- People with chronic health problems
- People who are dependent on drugs or alcohol
- People who are HIV positive

I THOUGHT THERE WAS A VACCINE AGAINST TB?

Yes - BCG vaccine helps to protect you against TB. It works best to protect children from the most serious forms of the disease. But it does not give complete protection, so you could still get TB.

IS THERE A TEST TO SEE IF YOU ARE INFECTED?

Yes - People who are at high risk of having been exposed to TB (close contacts of a new case, for example, or people newly arriving in the UK from a country where TB is common) are sometimes offered a skin test or X-ray. If this happens to you, please do take up the offer.

BE AWARE. BE SAFE. BE SURE

VISIT YOUR GP NOW IF YOU THINK YOU MAY HAVE TB OR CALL NHS DIRECT ON 0845 46 47

www.doh.gov.uk/tb
TB IS NOT A DISEASE OF THE PAST

Many people wrongly believe that tuberculosis - TB for short - is a disease of the past. Many also believe that it affects only people who are poor or who live in overcrowded conditions. Some think that having TB is something to be ashamed about.

THE REAL FACTS ABOUT TB

A third of the world’s population is estimated to be infected with the bacteria that cause TB, and across the world about 8 million people develop the disease every year. In fact in 1993, the World Health Organization declared TB a Global Emergency.

Most of these infections are in developing areas of the world, but TB has not disappeared from the UK. 7,000 cases were reported in the UK in the year 2000 alone.

The real facts are:

- TB can affect anyone, at any time.
- TB does not respect race, religion, rich or poor, caste or creed.
- AND
- TB is a curable disease
- TB is not Taboo

WHAT IS TB?

- Tuberculosis (TB) is a CURABLE infectious disease caused by bacteria known as *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*.
- TB most commonly affects the lungs (respiratory TB) but it can affect almost any part of the body.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF TB?

It is very important to be aware what to look out for in yourself, your family and friends. TB develops gradually. The most common symptoms are:

- Persistent cough - going on for more than three weeks
- Night sweats
- Weight loss
- High temperature

These symptoms can easily be confused with more common illnesses such as asthma and bronchitis.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU THINK YOU MAY BE SUFFERING SYMPTOMS OF TB?

Consult your GP straight away. Your doctor will be able to organise some simple tests, such as a chest X-ray or examination of a specimen of phlegm for the presence of TB bacteria.

REMEMBER - TB can be treated and the earlier it is diagnosed the less likely you are to pass the infection on to others.

HOW IS TB TREATED?

- TB is curable with a course of special antibiotics.
- Modern anti-TB drugs are extremely effective and in nearly all cases TB sufferers are no longer infectious and begin to feel much better after the first 2 weeks of treatment.
- However, it is very important that the antibiotics continue to be taken regularly for at least 6 months. Otherwise the disease can get worse and it may become resistant to the TB drugs so that they no longer work. This makes the disease more difficult to treat.
- Every one with TB has their treatment supervised by a specialist, and a specialist nurse will help you stick to your treatment throughout the course.
- You will usually be able to resume your normal daily life while taking the treatment.

HOW CAN YOU CATCH TB?

- The most common way is by breathing in TB bacteria in the air. The bacteria are spread when someone with TB of the lungs talks, coughs or sneezes.
- BUT
- You generally need to have had quite prolonged, close association with someone with TB to become infected.