

About tuberculosis presentation

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Tuberculosis *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* is an important disease due to the number of fatalities it causes. It has existed for thousands of years but it was first identified in 1882 by Dr Robert Koch. The microbe is shaped like a long rod and has a thick, waxy (myco) coating. This wall allows the germ to retain specific staining dyes, and to survive outside of a host body. TB has all the necessary genetic material to do so and to reproduce, and it undergoes binary fission (divides into two) every 16 to 20 hours.

The bacteria is transmitted through the air from exposure to bacilli in the saliva of infected persons and sputum coughed up from their lungs. Once inhaled, the droplets can enter the lungs to settle in the alveoli although not all persons exposed to TB become infected. Furthermore, the transmission of TB is dependent on the infected person being sputum smear positive, having a cough and adhering to a medication regime, and on the person being exposed being close, having frequent contact. Young children and older adults are at increased risk, and the risk is greater among immigrants from areas with high rates of TB, the homeless, drug users, those infected with HIV and those working with these groups. In addition, environmental factors include ventilation, space and duration of enclosure and sunlight. Symptoms of the disease, as opposed to a latent infection, include a persistent bad cough, swollen glands, chest pain, weakness, weight loss, loss of appetite, fever, night sweats, etc. Only the disease form leads to sickness and can spread to others.

The detection of TB is usually done by a skin or blood test, a chest x-ray showing abnormality or by having a molecular diagnostic test. If not infected, the conditions could still weaken the immune system. Three basic principles of treatment are using potent bactericidal drugs quickly to prevent

transmission, prolonged treatment, and continued intake of drugs. Before initiating therapy however, it is necessary to detect the presence of mycobacteria and assess drug sensitivity, especially if the patient has previously received antituberculosis drugs and live in areas where there is known resistance to the drugs. A preventive measure that can be taken is early diagnosis and treatment while it is in its latent form to prevent it developing into an active disease, spreading to others and preventing drug resistance developing.