



THE EXPERT



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THE SPREAD OF TB

With a recent outbreak reported in the country, find out what tuberculosis does to the body and how you can prevent it from taking more lives.

The first time I heard about tuberculosis (TB), it was when I needed to do a full health check before leaving to the United Kingdom for my studies. The doctor briefly told me about the disease, but I did not think much of its severity... until I learnt that it snatches away nearly 1.1 to 1.7 million lives annually.

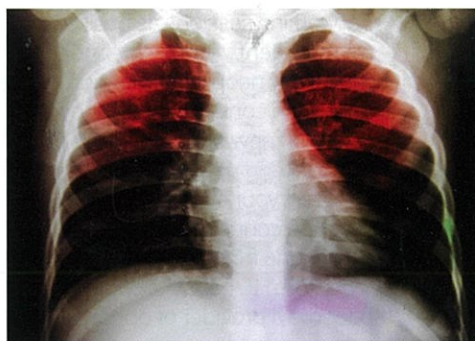
WHAT IS TUBERCULOSIS?

"TB is caused by mycobacterium tuberculosis, a rod-shaped bacterium that spreads through microscopic droplets released out in the open," explains Dr Jurina Binti Mohd Hassan, a consultant respiratory physician at Columbia Asia Hospital – Puchong. It usually affects the lungs. Left untreated, it can spread to someone who's in close proximity to you when you're speaking, coughing, laughing or sneezing.

RISK OF CONTRACTING THE DISEASE

Take extra precautions if you've spent time with a TB patient, or have been in a country where the disease is prevalent. HIV patients; kids younger than five years old; those who drink alcohol excessively, smoke or do drugs; and those who may or may not have been properly treated for the disease in the past are more susceptible to it.

Although there is a 22 per cent decline in TB deaths globally, the stark truth is that it has caused more deaths than HIV and malaria combined. It is ranked as one of the top 10 causes of deaths worldwide.



GUESS WHAT?

TB is extremely contagious and outbreaks can occur in crowded environments. An individual can carry this disease for two to 12 weeks, and remain contagious until he or she receives the right treatment.

THE OUTCOME OF LATE DETECTION

As late detection is a major factor in the spread of TB, you can do your part by being very alert to the signs and symptoms – both in yourself and others – and seeking treatment at once.

Signs and symptoms Be alert to prevent late detection

1. There are two forms of TB: latent TB infection and TB disease. Dr Jurina shares that with latent TB infection, the TB bacteria is inside the body but your system fights to stop the bacteria from growing. So, you won't display any symptoms and can't infect others with it. However, if the TB bacteria becomes active and spreads internally, you will contract TB disease and subsequently display symptoms, as well as be in danger of infecting others.

2. The TB bacteria often grows in the lungs and causes:

- Coughs that last three weeks or longer
- Pain in the chest
- The coughing up of blood or sputum (mixture of saliva and mucus from deep in the lungs)

3. You may also experience these symptoms:

- Feeling weak or fatigued
- Unexplained weight loss
- Loss of appetite
- Chills
- Fever
- Sweating at night