

Q The BCG vaccine

The BCG vaccine is given to babies and children who are at a higher risk of getting TB. Babies/children are at risk of TB and should receive the BCG vaccine if they fall under ANY of the following conditions:

- a) One or both parents (or anyone caring for the child) comes from a country with a high rate of TB such as: Africa, Russia (and the states of the former Soviet Union), the Indian sub-continent, South East Asia, China (including Hong Kong and Taiwan) and South America
- b) Any of the parents come from countries where the BCG is given routinely to babies
- c) Any of the parents/carers have lived in a country with a high rate of TB
- d) Parents intend to take their baby or child to a high risk country for 3 months or longer
- e) Parents will be living with a family member who has or had TB in the past.

The BCG vaccine may be given from birth to these high risk children and is given for free in Malta. Babies/children who are being tested for HIV or who suffer from a problem with their immune system should not receive the BCG vaccine.



Q Need to know more?

Call Chest Unit, Qormi Health Centre
Tel: 21 440 177 or Infectious Disease Prevention and Control Unit (IDCU) 2326 6000

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Reference:

US Centre for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/tb
Chest Clinic SLH
Health Promotion & Disease Prevention Directorate
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Ministry for Health, the Elderly
and Community Care

What you should know about Tuberculosis

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Q What is Tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused mainly by bacteria called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. These bacteria can attack any part of the body, but the lungs are mostly affected, in which case the disease may become infectious (TB disease).

Q How is TB transmitted?

TB is transmitted when a person inhales the TB germs via airborne infection from an untreated Infectious Pulmonary TB patient through coughing and sneezing.

One has to be ***in direct prolonged close contact for several hours*** with an infectious TB patient to get infected.

Q What is Latent TB Infection?

Latent TB is when the TB bacteria are inhaled into the lungs but are controlled by the immune system preventing them from multiplying and rendering them inactive for many years or for life. An infected person does not feel sick, has no symptoms of TB, does not have TB disease, and is not infectious to other people.

Q How does a person know if he/she has been infected?

By taking a skin and a blood test for TB.

A large skin test reaction together with a positive blood test are an indication that the person is infected with TB germs.

Q Is Latent TB infection treatable?

Yes effective drugs are available, which help to kill the TB bacteria and avoid the risk of developing active TB later on in life.

These are known as Preventive Treatment, and are to be taken daily for 3-6 months, according to the specialist's advice.

Q When does TB disease occur?

This happens when a person's immune system is weakened and cannot fight the TB bacteria any longer. Bacteria then break away and spread, causing TB disease.

Only 10% of those infected get TB disease.

Q What are the signs and symptoms of TB disease of the lung?

- Prolonged cough
- Haemoptysis (coughing up blood)
- Fever
- Weakness
- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss
- Night sweats
- Chest pain

Q Who is at greater risk of getting TB?

- Individuals with latent TB infection (especially in the first 2 years after infection)
- Immunodeficient individuals e.g. HIV/AIDS
- Persons with diabetes
- People living in countries with a high TB risk
- Refugee centres and prisons
- Prolonged contact with people with lung TB

Q Is TB Disease curable?

Yes. TB drugs are very effective as long as they are taken properly as prescribed. The treatment is normally given daily for six months, but can vary according to the patient's health condition. The drugs help to kill the TB bacteria, the patient will no longer be infectious, multi-drug resistance is avoided and the patient is finally cured.



Q Does BCG vaccination offer protection against TB?

Bacille-Calmette Guérin (BCG) protects babies and children <5 years old against the most severe forms of TB, like meningal and miliary TB. It is recommended to: family contacts of TB patients, to those working with persons having TB, to persons who intend to travel to high risk countries of TB and to babies born to individuals coming from high TB endemic countries. In Malta BCG is currently given to children in secondary schools.