

Mayo Clinic - Risk Factors of Tuberculosis

Anyone can get tuberculosis, but certain factors can increase your risk of the disease.

Risk factors

Weakened immune system

A healthy immune system can often successfully fight TB bacteria, but your body can't mount an effective defense if your resistance is low. A number of diseases and medications can weaken your immune system, including:

- HIV/AIDS
- Diabetes
- End-stage kidney disease
- Cancer treatment, such as chemotherapy
- Drugs to prevent rejection of transplanted organs
- Some drugs used to treat rheumatoid arthritis, Crohn's disease and psoriasis
- Malnutrition
- Advanced age
- International connections

TB risk is higher for people who live in or travel to countries that have high rates of tuberculosis, such as:

- Sub-Saharan Africa
- India
- China
- Mexico
- The islands of Southeast Asia and Micronesia
- Parts of the former Soviet Union
- Poverty and substance abuse

Lack of medical care. If you are on a low or fixed income, live in a remote area, have recently immigrated to the United States or are homeless, you may lack access to the medical care needed to diagnose and treat TB.

Substance abuse. Long-term drug or alcohol use weakens your immune system and makes you more vulnerable to tuberculosis.

Where you work or live

Health care work. Regular contact with people who are ill increases your chances of exposure to TB bacteria. Wearing a mask and frequent hand-washing greatly reduce your risk.

Living or working in a residential care facility. People who live or work in prisons, immigration centers or nursing homes are all at risk of tuberculosis. That's because the risk of the disease is higher anywhere there is overcrowding and poor ventilation.

Living in a refugee camp or shelter. Weakened by poor nutrition and ill health and living in crowded, unsanitary conditions, refugees are at especially high risk of tuberculosis infection.