

March 24 celebrates World TB Day! On this date in 1882, Dr. Robert Koch announced that he had discovered the bacillus that causes tuberculosis (TB). World TB day was established to raise awareness about TB and to support worldwide TB- control efforts. TB treatment and prevention has come a long way since 1882 however, people are still getting sick and dying from this terrible disease in our country. There is still much more work to be done to rid the world of this illness.

TB is a disease caused by a bacterium (*Mycobacterium tuberculosis*). The bacteria are easily spread through the air when someone with TB coughs, sneezes or even speaks. People around the infected individual breathe in these bacteria and become infected as well. TB is not spread by shaking someone's hand, sharing food or drinks or touching objects.

The bacteria usually attack the lungs. However, there are many other parts of the body that can be affected by TB such as the brain, spine and kidney. Signs and symptoms of TB depend upon which part of the body is affected. Some common symptoms may include:

- A bad cough that lasts three weeks or longer
- Pain in the chest
- Coughing up blood or sputum
- Weakness or fatigue
- Weight loss
- No appetite
- Chills
- Fever
- Sweating at night

Sometimes, individuals can become infected with TB without actually getting sick. This is called latent TB. The human body is often able to fight the bacteria when it enters the body and keep it from growing. People with latent TB do not feel sick and cannot spread the disease to other people. However, the bacteria may become active if the body's immune system fails to stop it from multiplying. Many people who have latent TB infection never develop active TB disease. Some people get sick shortly after infection while others maintain latent TB until their immune systems weaken for different reasons. If not treated properly with medication, TB is often fatal.

There are two kinds of tests that are used to detect TB bacteria in the body. The TB skin test (TST) or a TB blood test may be requested by your health care provider before starting a new medication that may lower your immune system. Some employers may require one of these tests annually as well if employees may potentially come into contact with TB, such as certain health care workers.