



WORLD TUBERCULOSIS DAY

MARCH 24

YOU OWE IT TO YOURSELF TO BE INFORMED ABOUT TUBERCULOSIS (TB)

What is the leading cause of death in South Africa? It may surprise you to learn that it is the treatable condition of tuberculosis (TB). TB is a widespread, bacterial infection that can be life-threatening.

So how can we beat TB? The answer lies in knowledge, getting diagnosed and treated, and to fight the stigma. As March is TB Awareness Month, the aim is to do just that.

Signs and symptoms of TB infection include feeling weak, fatigue, unexplained or sudden weight loss, lack of appetite, chills, fever and night sweats. In pulmonary TB (of the lung), which is the most common form of TB, the early signs are persistent cough for more than three weeks, chest pain and coughing up blood.

STOP THE STIGMA TO WIN THE WAR



Since there is a comorbid relationship between TB and HIV/AIDS, those who are infected may be reluctant to share their diagnosis. There are contributing factors like overcrowded and poor living conditions, malnutrition, and alcohol and drug abuse. However, people from all walks of life can get TB. In fact, an estimated 80% of people in South Africa carry inactive TB bacteria (latent TB infection).

STEPS TO TACKLE TB

Know your status

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 40% of people infected with TB are undiagnosed. If you have any of the symptoms mentioned above, you can go to your local government clinic and get a free TB test. Two sputum (spit) samples are taken, and results are available within a few days. In some cases, it may be necessary to take chest x-rays.



Take care of yourself

Give yourself a fighting chance of fighting off infection and, if you do get sick, of recovering more quickly. A balanced diet with fruits, vegetables, protein and wholegrains is crucial. Daily exercise, particularly in the fresh air, helps to keep your body healthy and combats stress, which also affects the immune system. Avoid smoking and alcohol abuse.

BCG vaccine

The Bacillus Calmette-Guérin (BCG) vaccine against TB is crucial for babies and young children as they're at a higher risk, both of contracting TB and of developing severe forms, such as deadly TB meningitis or TB affecting other organs besides the lungs. The vaccine is administered to babies at birth as part of the government's childhood Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI) schedule.



Be considerate

Remember the lessons we learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic? When coughing or sneezing, cover your mouth and nose with your arm or a tissue, don't spit in public areas, keep windows open and keep your distance from others. If you've been diagnosed with TB, inform your household and those with whom you've had close interaction, so they can be tested too.

Complete your treatment

The good news is that active TB can be treated by following the prescribed course of treatment. If you are diagnosed with TB, you will be prescribed a course of medication, which lasts at least six months. It is true that the treatment can have side effects but that is the case with any type of medication. What's more, after just two weeks on treatment, most people are already no longer infectious, so you can stop the spread. Sticking to your treatment programme and completing the full course is truly the most powerful thing you can do to help yourself and everyone around you.



Together we can stop the spread of TB! For more support in the fight against TB, reach out to our employee health and wellness programme for confidential counselling.

References

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- South African Government
- TB Alert
- TBFacts.org
- World Health Organization (WHO)

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Let us stay mindful of caring for one another and ourselves

