

Tuberculosis (TB) and your baby

What is TB?

Tuberculosis (TB) is a serious condition that can affect anyone, though you are at increased risk during pregnancy as it suppresses your immune system, making it easier for TB to take hold.

There are two forms of TB:

- **TB disease (active TB):** You'll feel increasingly ill and could pass TB on to others if the TB is in your lungs or throat. This type of TB requires urgent treatment with antibiotics.
- **TB infection (latent TB):** This is when TB bacteria are living quietly in your body. They do not cause symptoms and cannot be passed to others. However, you can become ill with TB disease at any time, which is more likely when you are pregnant. TB infection can be treated with antibiotics, even during pregnancy, to prevent it from developing into TB disease.

Common symptoms

- cough
- fever
- night sweats
- weight loss
- loss of appetite
- tiredness

TB disease symptoms and diagnosis

Symptoms of TB disease can include a cough, fever, night sweats, weight loss, loss of appetite, and tiredness. These symptoms can be vague and may be mistaken for typical pregnancy aches and pains. It is important to see a doctor if any symptoms last for three weeks or longer.

If a doctor suspects TB, they may recommend tests such as a TB skin or blood test, a sputum test, or a chest x-ray. A chest x-ray, which looks for signs of TB in the lungs, has a very small risk of harming the baby, which is much less than the risk from TB itself.

How might TB disease affect me or my baby?

If diagnosis and treatment are delayed, TB disease can increase the risk of early labour and having a small baby. Although the risk of the baby getting TB while in the womb is very small, newborns are very vulnerable to the disease.



Treating TB during pregnancy and breastfeeding

Both TB infection and disease can be treated safely during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

- **TB infection:** A three-month course of antibiotics reduces the risk of developing TB disease and passing it on to your baby.
- **TB disease:** This can be cured with at least six months of antibiotics. The treatment quickly reduces any chance of passing TB on, so you can usually stay with your newborn safely once you have started.



What happens if my family is exposed to TB?

If your baby is at risk of developing TB, they will be started on medication to prevent them from becoming ill. Treatment will be stopped after a few months if they have a negative skin test and blood test. They will then be offered a BCG vaccination, which is a good idea to accept. If the tests come back positive, treatment will continue for a few months more, usually six in total.

The rest of your family and other close contacts will also be seen and assessed for TB by members of the TB team, in a process called contact tracing.



Information and support

Your TB and midwifery teams will work together to support you through this time. For further information and support, contact:

TB Alert information service: for any questions or concerns about TB, email contact@tbalert.org or call **0330 102 2403**. Talk to others who have been through TB online at: healthunlocked.com/tb-alert. Or email contact@tbalert.org to arrange direct support.