

# Tuberculosis of the cervix

*Patient Information Series – What you should know, what you should ask.*

## **What is tuberculosis of the cervix?**

Tuberculosis or TB is a bacterium that can affect any part of your body, but most often affects the lungs. The primary infection in the lungs is known as pulmonary tuberculosis. In some cases, the TB infection moves through the blood to other parts of the body. When the bacterium reaches the genital tract, it causes genital tuberculosis or pelvic TB.

## **How does a cervical TB happen?**

Women who have pulmonary (lung) TB will eventually develop uterine and pelvic TB if it is left untreated. Genital tuberculosis of the cervix may also spread due to sexual contact with an infected person.

## **What are the symptoms of tuberculosis of the cervix and genital TB in general?**

Genital TB is usually a silent infection with no apparent symptoms as the bacteria may remain latent in your body for as long as 10 to 20 years. However, some of the symptoms to watch out for include:

1. Irregular menstrual cycle
2. Pelvic pain
3. Vaginal discharge that is stained with blood or which is persistent, heavy and discoloured
4. Bleeding after intercourse
5. Infertility

Sometimes the lack of symptoms makes it difficult to diagnose genital tuberculosis. Depending upon your symptoms, your doctor may advise you to take tests to confirm the diagnosis.

## **How can genital TB affect my fertility?**

In women, genital or pelvic TB usually affects the fallopian tubes causing tubal obstruction, which cannot be reversed. If the TB is diagnosed at an early stage and the infection is treated, the damage to the uterus or fallopian tubes may heal.

If left untreated for long, TB in the fallopian tubes, ovaries, and uterus may not heal and lead to scarring. Scarring of the uterus usually results in scanty periods. In some, the menstrual periods may completely stop because the uterine lining may be badly affected. Unfortunately, in these cases, women may not be able to conceive.

## **How is tuberculosis of the cervix and/or genital TB treated?**

The treatment for genital TB is the same as for lung TB or any other form of TB. It is a course of antibiotics that lasts about six to eight months. It is important to complete the entire course of the treatment.

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