

Frequently asked questions by the patients on DOTS therapy and the answer given by the DOTS providers

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The present survey was conducted in Dakshina Kannada District of Karnataka state in India between January and March 2009. A list of the DOTS providers registered in the Mangalore (Urban) unit in Dakshina Kannada District was obtained from the health authorities. There were 123 DOT providers in the Mangalore urban unit covering a population of approximately three lakhs. Out of these 34 (27.6%) were health workers (male/female) and 89 (72.4%) were Anganwadi workers. Population served by majority (95) of DOT providers varied between 1500 - 2000. For the purpose of survey a total of 14 randomly selected health workers and 34 randomly selected Anganwadi workers were contacted. Purpose of the survey was explained to them. They were asked to give the ten most frequently asked questions by the patients on DOTS therapy. Then they were asked to tell the answers provided by them for each of those queries. Questions provided by these DOT providers were analysed and twenty most frequently asked questions were sorted. Following are the twenty most frequently asked questions and the answers provided by the DOT providers.

Q1. How long I have to take these tablets?

Ans: You must take the treatment regularly till you are completely cured, that is when you have taken the medicine for prescribed period (usually 6-9 months) and your sputum examination is declared to be negative by your doctor after completion of the treatment.

Q2. Can I get this medicine from medical shop?

Ans: No, you cannot get this medicine from medical shop. This medicine is available only in government supply.

Q3. Will this disease spread to my family by touching and contacting?

Ans: No, This disease does not spread by touching or contacting, it is spread by inhaling droplets containing germs of the disease coughed out by a person with the disease.

Q4. If I get stomach pain, can I take these tablets?

Ans: Yes, you must take these tablets regularly. If you have any problems then consult your doctor.

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Q5. Are there any side effects of these tablets?

Ans: So far no serious side effects have been observed with these medicines.

Q6. While taking these medicines do I need to take more food?

Ans: Yes, you need to take more nutritious food.

Q7. Is TB a curable disease?

Ans: Yes, TB is a completely curable disease if the treatment is started early and carried out as per your doctor's advice. Further all the tests and medicines are available free of cost.

Q8. Is TB a hereditary disease?

Ans: No, TB is not a hereditary disease. It is caused by a germ and spreads from person to person.

Q9. Are these weekly visits necessary?

Ans: Yes, very important it helps to assess the effect of the drugs.

Q10. Is there any chance to reduce the tablets?

Ans: No

Q11. Can I stop the medicine when my general condition improves.

Ans: No, you need to take the medicine till the time your doctor asks to take.

Q12. Will it re-occur in future?

Ans: Cannot say.

Q13. Should I get admitted to hospital for safety of my family members?

Ans: No, you need not. On starting DOTS, you will be disinfected within forty eight hours and hence will not spread it to others.

Q14. What if I forget taking drugs one day?

Ans: You should not miss taking tablets and unfortunately if you miss then you should report to your doctor and follow his advice.

Q15. How does this disease spread?

Ans: By inhaling germs coughed out by an infectious patient of tuberculosis.

Q16. Why are you collecting empty strips of this medicine?]

Ans: This is the system of DOTS to ensure that patients have received full course of treatment.

Q17. What are the main symptoms of TB?

Ans: Cough for three or more weeks, expectoration, fever (especially at night), weight loss, blood in the sputum etc.

Q18. Does it (TB) spread from mother to child?

Ans: Yes, if the mother is having germs of the disease in her sputum, she can transmit it to the child, but the child can still be protected by taking chemoprophylaxis.

Q19. Do I have to visit the centre daily till the treatment is completed?

Ans: No, you have to come thrice a week during first two months and then once a week for the rest of the treatment period.

Q20. Is there any vaccine to prevent tuberculosis?

Ans: Yes, we have BCG vaccine, but it protects against serious forms of tuberculosis in children and does not provide any protection during adult life.