

1 Introduction

“Diarrhea attacking a person affected with phthisis is a mortal symptom.”

— Hippocrates, *Aphorisms* 5.14

“It is impossible to diagnose abdominal tuberculosis with any degree of certainty, since the disease mimics many other abdominal conditions and histological confirmation may be equivocal.”

— Joseph Walsh, *Transactions of the National Association for the Study and Prevention of Tuberculosis* 1909;5:217–22

Tuberculosis (TB) is an infectious disease caused by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, typically causing pulmonary TB. TB is the ninth most frequent cause of death worldwide and is the leading cause due to a single infectious agent, ranking above human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS).

In 2017, 10 million people developed TB disease and 1.6 million died of it, including 0.3 million among people with HIV—TB is the leading killer of HIV-positive people [1].

- About one-quarter of the world’s population have latent TB.0
- People infected with TB bacteria have a 5–15% lifetime risk of falling ill with TB. However, persons with compromised immune systems, such as people living with HIV, malnutrition, diabetes, those taking immunosuppressive drugs, and people who use tobacco, have a much higher risk of falling ill.
- Multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB) continues to be a public health issue and a health security threat. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that there were 558,000 new patients with resistance to rifampicin—the most effective first-line drug—among whom 82% had MDR-TB.
- Globally, the incidence of TB is falling at about 2% per year.
- An estimated 60 million lives were saved through TB diagnosis and treatment between 2000 and 2019 [1].

Abdominal tuberculosis is uncommon in comparison with pulmonary TB. Gastrointestinal TB makes up 2.5% of extrapulmonary cases in the United States [2].

- Lymph-node disease is the most common presentation of extrapulmonary TB (EPTB), both in individuals with HIV infection and HIV-seronegative patients.
- Pleural TB accounts for approximately 20% of all EPTB cases.
- Genitourinary TB accounts for 10–15% of all cases of EPTB in the U.S.

Early diagnosis remains difficult, due to the nonspecific clinical presentation of TB, which can mimic other gastrointestinal diseases and may vary from an acute to a chronic abdomen in areas endemic for TB. While some may benefit from antitubercular therapy, others may develop surgical problems such as strictures, obstruction, fistulas, or perforations, which may necessitate surgical intervention.