



hand hygiene

# Move Over COVID-19: I Am the Baddest Bug on the Planet

**C** COVID-19 this. COVID-19 that. COVID-19 the other. The saying goes that the greatest trick the Devil ever played is convincing the world he doesn't exist. Well, I'm not the Devil, but I spread a lot of heartbreaking evil around. You haven't exactly forgotten about me, but you don't think about me that much either, that's for sure. At least not if you're living in a developed country. And that was the case even before COVID-19. Now? Forget it.

But I'm still out here. And although medicine is making strides against me, I'm far from finished. I'm going to kill about 4 million people this year. In 2018, I infected 10 million, and 1.5 million of them died.

The World Health Organization (WHO) listed me among its urgent health challenges that require global attention. I'm caused by bacteria that usually attack the lungs, but I can wreak havoc elsewhere, such as the kidney, spine, and even the brain.

Just like you-know-who, I come at you like the flu. You'll suffer chills, exhaustion, a loss of appetite, chest pain, and weight loss. And coughing. Man, such coughing. Coughing fits,

in fact; the hard, brutal kind that makes you hack up blood and sputum, the mucus that lies deep, deep inside your lungs.

I'm also sneaky. In my latent state I can live in your body without making you sick. You can thank your immune system for that. It keeps me from growing. It doesn't always keep me from going, though, as in going on to infect others.

In my active state, if I'm not stopped by antibiotics, I'll kill you. Common meds they throw at me include:

- Isoniazid
- Rifampin (Rifadin, Rimactane)
- Ethambutol (Myambutol)
- Pyrazinamide

What you take will depend on your age, overall health, and where I happen to be doing my dirty work in your body. You'll probably have to take 2 or 3 drugs at once. You'll need drugs against my latent stage, too, but maybe only 1 or 2.

So, go ahead, keep on obsessing about COVID-19. Don't worry about me. I'm doing just fine.

Who am I? **[GT]**

*Mycobacterium tuberculosis*