

What You Need to Know About Tuberculosis

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by germs that are spread from person to person through the air. TB usually affects the lungs, but it can also affect other parts of the body, such as the brain, the kidneys, or the spine.

Not everyone infected with TB germs becomes sick. As a result, two TB-related conditions exist: Latent TB infection and Active TB disease. If not treated properly, TB disease can be fatal.



The Difference Between Latent TB and Active TB Disease

A Person With Latent TB Infection

- Has a small amount of TB germs in their body that are alive but inactive.
- Has no symptoms and does not feel sick.
- Cannot spread TB germs to others.
- Usually has a positive TB blood test or TB skin test indicating TB infection.
- Has a normal chest x-ray and a negative sputum smear.
- Needs treatment for inactive TB to prevent active TB disease.

A Person With Active TB Disease

- Has a large amount of active TB germs in their body.
- Has symptoms and feels sick.
- May spread TB germs to others.
- Usually has a positive TB blood test or TB skin test indicating TB infection.
- May have an abnormal chest x-ray, or positive sputum smear or culture.
- Needs treatment for active TB disease.

If your body cannot stop TB germs from growing, you develop active TB disease. Symptoms of active TB disease include:

- A cough that lasts 3 weeks or longer
- Fever, night sweats, chills
- Chest pain
- Unexplained weight loss
- Coughing blood or sputum
- Weakness or fatigue

Who should be tested?

- Those exposed to someone with active TB, especially those:
 - Under 5 years old
 - Weak immune systems
 - Close contact with someone with TB



Testing for TB

Getting tested and treated for TB can protect yourself, your family and friends, and your community. There are two types of tests for TB infection: the **TB blood test** and the **TB skin test**.

+ A Positive Test For TB Infection

You have TB germs in your body. Your doctor will do other tests to determine if you have latent TB or active TB disease. These tests may include a chest x-ray, and a test of the sputum you cough up.

- A Negative Test For TB Infection

A negative test means you likely do not have latent TB or active TB disease.

Your doctor may do more tests if:

- You have symptoms of active TB disease, like coughing, chest pain, fever, weight loss, or tiredness.
- You have HIV infection.
- Your exposure to TB germs was recent, you may need a second test **8-10** weeks after exposure.

Many people born outside of the United States have received the BCG TB vaccine. BCG vaccination does not completely prevent people from getting TB. A positive reaction to a TB skin test may be due to the BCG vaccine itself or due to infection with TB germs. Talk to your doctor about which TB test is best for you.



TB Can Be Treated

TB germs can live in your body for years without causing symptoms. If you have inactive TB, treating it is the best way to protect you from getting sick with active TB disease.

If you have been diagnosed with active TB disease, you can be treated with medicine for 6 months. To treat latent TB infection, you can be treated with preventative medication for 3-9 months is recommended. You will need to take and finish all of your TB medicine as directed by your doctor or nurse. This is to help you feel better and prevent other people from getting sick.

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