



Durham Region Health Department **Facts about...**



Latent Tuberculosis Infection

What is it?

Tuberculosis (TB) bacteria can live in the body without making people sick. This is called latent tuberculosis infection (LTBI). In most people who breathe in TB bacteria, the body's immune system fights the bacteria by building a wall to stop TB from spreading. The TB germs are inactive, but they remain in the body and can wake up and become active later.

People with LTBI:

- Have no symptoms
- Do not feel sick
- Cannot spread TB bacteria to others
- Usually have a positive TB skin test reaction or positive TB blood test
- May develop active TB disease if they do not receive treatment for latent TB infection

How does LTBI develop into active TB?

People with LTBI are not contagious and cannot spread TB. The TB bacteria are not growing.

TB bacteria become active if the immune system can't stop them from growing. When TB bacteria are active (multiplying in your body), this is called TB disease (active TB). People with TB disease may spread the bacteria to people they spend time with every day. Symptoms of active TB of the lung can include cough, fever, night sweats, weight loss, loss of appetite and tiredness (see 'Facts About...Tuberculosis').

Many people who have LTBI never develop TB disease. Some people develop TB disease soon after becoming infected (within weeks) before their immune system can fight the TB bacteria. Other people may get sick years later when their immune system becomes weak for another reason.

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If you require this information in an accessible format, contact 1-800-841-2729.



What do I look for?

- People with LTBI often do not know that they are infected.
- Screening and treatment for LTBI should be considered based on risks for prior TB exposure and risk factors for development of active TB
- Testing for LTBI is done with a tuberculosis skin test (TST) or sometimes with a blood test (IGRA). See 'Facts About...TB Skin Testing'.
- A TB skin test or TB blood test that is positive will show if someone has been exposed to the TB germ.
- The person may need other tests such as a chest x-ray and a doctor's exam to make sure they do not have active TB disease.

How is it treated?

- LTBI can be treated with medication to stop it from becoming active disease in the future. This can be prescribed by your health care provider.
- TB medications are available free of charge through the Health Department.
- Medicine to treat LTBI and prevent active TB disease must be taken every day for four months to nine months. The medicine is taken for a long time because the TB germ is very strong and difficult to get rid of.
- There are two medications that are often used to treat LTBI. Rifampin is given for four months. Isoniazid or INH is given for nine months. It is often given with vitamin B6.
- It is important to take the medication **every day** and until your doctor tells you stop. If you do not, some TB germs might stay in your body and could make you sick.

How can I protect myself?

- Discuss testing and risk factors for TB exposure with your health care provider.
- If your TB skin test is positive, contact your doctor/health care provider and the Health Department.
- Make sure that you take all the medication as prescribed by your doctor/health care provider.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow and encourage others to do the same.
- If you are ill, stay home and isolate yourself from others.

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