

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

ABOUT TB

Tuberculosis (TB) is an infectious disease caused by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* (*M. tuberculosis*). It is an illness that mainly affects the lungs, although it can attack any part of the body. It is caused by bacteria spread through the air when a person with active TB disease coughs, laughs, sings or sneezes. TB is a major cause of illness and death in many parts of the world. Continued efforts to eliminate TB abroad and in the United States are still needed.

Someone with active TB disease may spread it to people nearby such as friends, family, coworkers, and schoolmates. TB can be serious and even fatal. Fortunately, TB can be prevented with treatment.

ABOUT LTBI

People who have a latent tuberculosis infection (LTBI) are infected with the *M. tuberculosis* bacteria. Some people with TB bacteria in their body may never develop active TB disease. Other people, especially those with weakened immune systems and other risk factors, can develop active TB disease.

People with LTBI do not feel sick, so they often do not know they carry the bacteria. They do not have any symptoms. They are not contagious. But if their latent TB infection develops into active TB disease, without treatment, they could become sick, spread TB to others, and even die.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2012). *Tuberculosis: Get the Facts!* [Brochure]. https://www.cdc.gov/tb/publications/pamphlets/Tuberculosis_Get_the-facts.pdf

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention. (2014). *Questions and Answers about Tuberculosis [TB]*. <https://www.cdc.gov/tb/publications/faqs/pdfs/qa.pdf>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention. (2014). *TB: What You Need to Know about Tuberculosis Infection*. https://www.cdc.gov/tb/publications/pamphlets/tb_infection.pdf



Latent TB. Active Concern. Tuberculosis Program

Virginia Department of Health

PHONE: 804-864-7906

FAX: 804-371-0248 or 804-416-5178

EMAIL: tuberculosis@vdh.virginia.gov

WEB: www.vdh.virginia.gov/tuberculosis/



The Virginia Department of Health TB Program aims to prevent, treat, and eliminate TB to protect the health and promote the well-being of all people in Virginia.

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ASSESS • TEST • TREAT

LATENT TB. ACTIVE CONCERN.



THE BASICS OF
LATENT TB INFECTION

Tuberculosis Program
Virginia Department of Health

I. ASSESS

Determine if you may be at risk for Latent TB

You live or work in a large group setting where active TB disease may be common, such as a:

- Homeless shelter
- Correctional facility
- Nursing home

You have a weakened immune system because of:

- HIV
- An organ transplant
- Medication you take

You have spent time with someone who has active TB disease

You use injection drugs

You have active TB symptoms, such as:

- Cough that lasts more than 3 weeks
- Fever
- Chest pain
- Weight loss
- Night sweats
- Fatigue
- Decreased appetite

You were born in, spent more than a month in or traveled frequently to areas where active TB disease is common, such as:

- Africa
- Asia
- Mexico
- Central America
- South America
- The Caribbean
- Eastern Europe

Over 80% of those who become sick from active TB disease in the U.S. had untreated latent TB.

II. TEST

Request a TB test

TB Test Options

Even if you don't feel sick, you may have LTBI. If you have any of the previously mentioned risk factors, you should request a test for TB, either from your doctor or the local health department. You may have either a blood test or a skin test; both are relatively painless. If you test positive, your doctor will order a chest X-ray to see whether you have active or latent TB. If you test negative and have a weakened immune system or recent infection, your doctor may order another test.

TB Testing and BCG Vaccine

In some countries where active TB disease is common, a preventative bacille Calmette-Guérin (BCG) vaccine is given to infants and small children. This is not a common practice in the U.S., but if you were born in another country, you may have received the BCG vaccine when you were very young. In that case, the TB blood test is the best choice when testing for latent TB.

If you have received the BCG vaccine, you should be tested using a TB blood test. The skin test may yield a positive reaction even if you are not infected with TB bacteria.



III. TREAT

Complete Treatment

Treatment

If your test for latent TB is positive, there are several treatment options available. Your doctor will recommend medications to reduce your risk of developing active TB disease. Remember that only active TB disease is contagious, so you are not endangering your family and friends if you have latent TB.

It is very important to treat latent TB as soon as you are diagnosed. The best way to protect yourself is to finish all your medication as directed. The only way to get rid of TB bacteria is to take TB medicine. If you stop treatment early or skip doses, TB bacteria can overpower your body.

After Treatment

Even after you complete treatment, you will likely test positive in the future. You should ask your doctor to give you a written record saying you completed the entire course of treatment. And unfortunately, it is possible to get TB in the future if you have a new exposure. The medicine you take will only get rid of the TB bacteria in your body at that time.

LTBI can be treated quickly.
Treatment may be just 3-4 months.

For additional questions, please contact the Virginia Department of Health TB Program.

804-864-7906