Latent Tuberculosis Infection

Learn about testing and treatment

NYC Health

Tuberculosis (TB) germs can cause a life-threatening illness. Luckily, many people with **TB infection** can be treated before they get sick.

- **Learn** about **TB infection**.

- **Get tested** if you're at risk.

- **Get treatment** if you have **TB infection**.
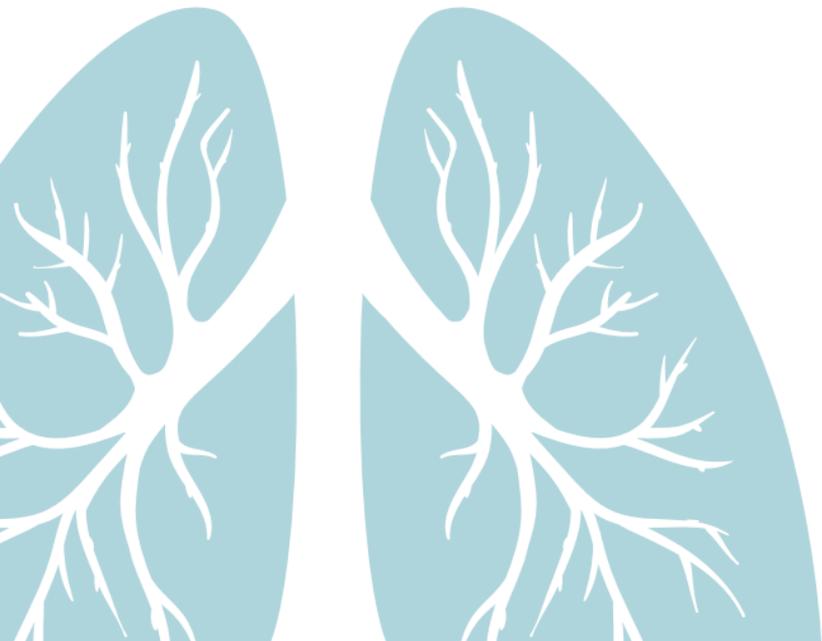
Learn

TB infection is caused by a type of bacteria called Mycobacterium tuberculosis. A person who feels fine can still have a TB infection. Health care providers call that **latent TB infection**. Latent means inactive.

- The infection can stay in your body for a long time. It can eventually make you very sick.

- If you get sick from the infection, it is called **active TB disease**.

- Taking medicine for TB infection can protect you from developing **active TB disease**.

- **Active TB disease** is a serious sickness and people can die from it if left untreated.

You cannot spread **latent TB infection** to others. But if you become sick with **active TB disease**, you can make other people sick too. You can spread **active TB disease** just by coughing or talking.

Latent TB
(not sick)

Active TB
(sick and can spread to others)
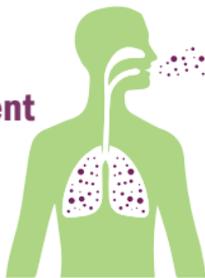
No Treatment
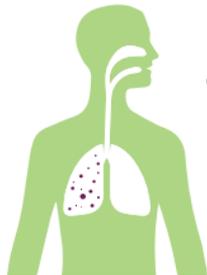
Latent TB
(not sick)

Protected

Treatment
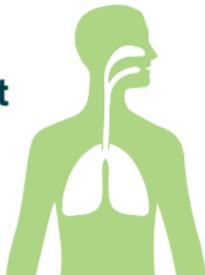
What does latent TB infection look like?

Latent TB infection does not cause any symptoms, so it does not usually look like anything. The only way to know for sure is to have a TB test.

What does active TB disease look like?

People with active TB disease might have:

- A cough that does not go away
- A high fever
- Night sweats
- Extreme tiredness
- Weight loss

How can I protect myself and my family?
Get tested and get treated.

A Latent TB Infection Story

"A few years ago, I received a positive TB blood test. My doctor told me I had a latent TB infection. I felt fine, so I did not take the medicine she gave me. Last month, I got very sick with a fever and cough. I now have active TB disease. I have to take a lot of medicine now. I might have made other people sick too. This would not have happened if I had taken my medicine earlier when I found out I had a TB infection."

Get Tested

How do I know if I have a TB infection?
The only way to know is to get tested.

Get tested if you answer yes to any of these questions:

- Have you lived with or spent time with anyone who had or may have had **active TB disease**?
- Are you living with HIV, diabetes, cancer or another condition that could weaken your immune system?
- Do you take medicine that weakens your immune system?
- Were you born in, have you traveled to or lived in (for more than 30 days in a row) a high TB incidence area, such as Africa, Asia, Mexico, Central or South America, the Caribbean or Eastern Europe?

Ask your provider for a blood test for TB infection.

A Latent TB Infection Story

"I come from a country where a lot of people have TB. My doctor gave me a blood test. The test was positive. Even though I did not feel sick, I was glad to find out. I am getting treatment for my latent TB infection so I will not get sick with active TB disease."

Get Treated

I found out I have a latent TB infection. Now what?

Talk to your health care provider about which treatment you should have. There are different treatment options available. Treatment for a latent TB infection helps protect you from getting sick with active TB disease, which you could spread to other people.

> Getting treated will protect you and your loved ones.

A Latent TB Infection Story

"I thought treating my latent TB infection was going to take a really long time. My doctor told me about a newer, shorter treatment. It only took three months. I only had to take medicine once each week. Now that I am done, I am not worried that I will develop active TB disease and spread it to my family."

Resources

- NYC Health Map: **nyc.gov/health/map**
  - The NYC Health Department Chest Centers provide free evaluation and treatment for TB in your language. They do not ask about your immigration status.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) TB Personal Stories: **cdc.gov/tb/topic/basics/personalstories.htm**
- We Are TB patient support network: **wearetb.com**

Get tested and treated to protect yourself and your loved ones.

For more information, talk with your health care provider or visit **nyc.gov/health/tb**.

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