

Latent Tuberculosis Infection

What is tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by a type of germ called a bacteria. TB bacteria usually attack the lungs, but they can also affect other parts of the body such as the kidney, spine and brain.

How is TB spread?

TB bacteria spread from one person to another through the air.

When a person with TB disease of the lungs coughs, sneezes, speaks or sings, TB bacteria go into the air. People nearby may breathe in the bacteria and become infected. This is more likely to happen to people who spend time with the sick person everyday, such as family, friends, classmates or coworkers.

TB infection in other parts of the body does not usually spread to others.



If you or your child have been in close contact with someone who is confirmed to have TB disease, make an appointment to see your family doctor.

Does TB bacteria always make you sick?

No. Not everyone infected with TB bacteria becomes sick.

In most people, the body's defense (immune) system is able to fight the bacteria and stop them from growing. The bacteria remain alive, but they are inactive or 'asleep'. This is called **Latent TB Infection**.

Many people can be infected with TB bacteria, but have no symptoms.

This is called Latent (sleeping or dormant) Tuberculosis Infection.

People with **Latent TB Infection** have no symptoms, do not feel sick and cannot spread it to others. However, it is possible for the bacteria to 'wake up' and become active later.

In some people, the immune system is not able to fight the bacteria. The bacteria continue to grow and can make the person very sick. This is called **Active TB Disease**. A person with Active TB Disease of the lungs, can spread the bacteria to others.

How do you know my child has Latent TB Infection?

Your doctor will examine your child. This is the most important part of diagnosing Latent TB Infection.

Your child will not feel sick or have any symptoms, but skin and blood tests can tell that your child has been infected with the TB bacteria. If your child has a chest x-ray or sputum test, there will be no signs of Active TB Disease.

Should Latent TB Infection be treated?

Yes, we recommend that your child has treatment with medications to kill the bacteria. Without treatment, the bacteria may 'wake up' later, begin to grow and cause Active TB Disease.

Because TB bacteria are very strong and hard to kill, **your child will need to take medications.** The most common medications used to treat Latent TB Infection are Isoniazid (INH) and Rifampin (RIF).



To kill all the bacteria, make sure your child takes all the medication as directed and finishes the entire treatment. This may take 6 to 12 months.

Stopping the medication too soon or not taking it regularly can cause the TB bacteria to grow or become resistant to the medication. This could make your child get very sick.

TB medications are provided free of charge from your local Public Health Unit.

How will my child benefit from treatment?

Treatment will reduce the chance that the TB bacteria in your child's body will 'wake up' and become active later on.

Treatment reduces the chance of getting Active TB Disease by 90%

For example:

Children younger than 1 year of age with Latent TB Infection:

- Without treatment, **50** out of 100 will develop Active TB Disease
- With treatment, **5** out of 100 will develop Active TB Disease

Children 10 years or older with Latent TB Infection:

- Without treatment, **10** out of 100 will develop Active TB Disease
- With treatment, **1** out of 100 will develop Active TB Disease

Warning



**Infectious
Diseases
Clinic**

**905-521-2100
ext 75253**

Call the Infectious Diseases Clinic right away and STOP the medication if your child develops the following symptoms during treatment:

- vomiting
- diarrhea
- abdominal pain or
- yellowing of the skin

Your child will likely need a blood test to make sure the medication is not causing these symptoms.

If you cannot reach the Infectious Diseases Clinic, take your child to the nearest hospital emergency department.

Where can I get more information?

Public Health Agency of Canada:

www.phac-aspc.gc.ca Click on Infectious Diseases, then Tuberculosis.

Health Canadians:

www.healthycanadians.gc.ca Click on Health, then Diseases and Conditions, then Tuberculosis.

Understanding Tuberculosis: A Summary

