

TB

(also known as
Tuberculosis)

the facts and its treatment

What is TB?

TB (also known as Tuberculosis) is an infectious disease caused by germs (bacteria).

TB usually affects the lungs.

It can also affect other parts of the body such as the brain, kidneys or spine.

What is the difference between latent TB infection and TB disease?

Latent TB infection means that someone has the TB germs in their body but the body's defences are protecting them from the germs.

People with latent TB infection do not feel sick or have symptoms.

They **cannot** pass the TB germ to anyone.

TB disease is usually called 'active' TB (active tuberculosis)

TB disease means that someone has become sick from the TB germs.

Having TB disease means that you can spread the disease to other people.

A person with TB disease needs to see a doctor as soon as possible.

What are the symptoms of active TB?

People with active TB may have some or all of the following symptoms or signs of the disease:

- A cough that lasts for more than 3 weeks sometimes with blood stained sputum (spit)
- Fevers – being hot and having a high temperature
- Unexplained weight loss – losing weight for no reason
- Night sweats
- Always feeling tired
- Not hungry
- Pain and / or swelling in the affected area when TB is outside the lungs.

Some people with active TB may have only mild symptoms or signs of the disease.

How is TB spread?

TB is spread through the air when a person with TB in the lungs or throat coughs sneezes or speaks.

When other people breathe in these germs they can become infected. Most people get TB germs from someone they spend a lot of time with, like a family member or friend.

TB is **NOT** spread by household items (for example by cutlery, crockery, drinking glasses, sheets, clothes or telephone) so it is not necessary to use separate household items.

To prevent TB from spreading to other people:

- People with active TB in their lungs are instructed to cover their nose and mouth when they cough or sneeze
- People with active TB in their lung are isolated until they are no longer infectious

Who is at risk from TB infections?

People most at risk of TB are those who have spent long periods of time in close contact with a person who has TB of their lungs or respiratory tract.

Most people who get TB get latent TB.

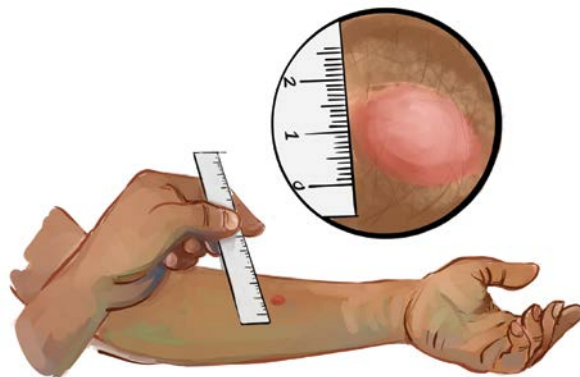
The latent TB is more likely to re-activate (to become active TB) in people who

- have chronic medical illnesses such as cancer, leukaemia, HIV or kidney failure
- take medication that affects their immune system
- in infants and children younger than 5 years

There is also an increased risk in smokers, those with diabetes, and those who are newly arrived from a country where there is a lot of TB.

What are the common tests for TB?

- A chest X-ray can show whether TB has affected the lungs
- A sputum test shows if TB germs are present in coughed up sputum (spit)
- The Tuberculin Skin Test (Mantoux test) or the interferon gamma test (sometimes known as a Quantiferon Gold) show if a person has latent TB.



Picture of the Tuberculin Skin Test (Mantoux test).

How is active TB treated?

A combination of special antibiotics will be given for 6 to 12 months. TB can be cured if treatment is completed and taken correctly. You must finish the treatment even if you start to feel better.

If you are very ill TB treatment is begun in hospital.

How is latent TB treated?

In those less than 35 years old an antibiotic called Isoniazid is given for six to nine months.

This kills the TB germ and prevents it from becoming active TB. In people over 35 years, regular chest X-rays are sometimes ordered to monitor the latent TB to make sure it isn't becoming active.

For more information

Contact your local Chest Clinic or see your family doctor.

All TB test and treatment are provided free and confidentially at chest clinics. Regardless of their visa status people will be treated free of charge and the diagnosis will not affect their visa status.

A referral (a letter) from your doctor is **NOT** needed to attend a chest clinic.

A Medicare card is **NOT** needed

