

Latent Tuberculosis infection

Tuberculosis (TB) is a bacterial infection, which spreads from one person to another through coughing or sneezing the tuberculosis bacteria. People within the immediate environment of a contagious person can be exposed to tuberculosis through inhaling the bacteria.

All people exposed to tuberculosis do not become infected and most people who become infected do not develop disease, i.e. a person with diagnosed tuberculosis is not necessarily contagious. In most cases, the body's own immune system can reduce and stop the spread of tuberculosis bacteria. Hence, the bacteria are not active but remain inside the body and can in some cases become active later in life. This is called **latent TB infection**. A person with latent TB infection is infected with *M. tuberculosis*, but do not have TB disease.

People with **latent TB infection**:

- do not feel sick and do not have any symptoms
- cannot spread TB bacteria to others
- get a positive reaction to the tuberculin skin test or TB blood test
- could develop TB disease later in life

90 % of people with latent TB infection never develop TB disease. The risk of developing TB disease is higher for those newly infected (two years after transmission). Others at higher risk of developing TB disease after being exposed and infected are children and adolescents, women who recently gave birth and people with a weak immune system due to various medical conditions or immunosuppressive treatment.

If there are no obvious reasons to why medical treatment shouldn't be initiated, a newly infected person with latent TB infection is usually given medical treatment. If a person with latent TB infection develops symptoms like longstanding cough, fever or weight loss, a doctor should be contacted for further examinations.