

TUBERCULOSIS FACT SHEET

CLIENT INFORMATION



**Central
Health**

1. What is Tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis is a disease often called TB and is spread by tiny germs that float in the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. People nearby can breathe the germs into their lungs and contract the infection. People who have latent TB infection (inactive TB disease) cannot spread it to others. Most people infected with the germ will not get sick. However, some people will get sick and may also develop TB disease which usually attacks the lungs and sometimes the kidneys, brain or spine. People who have TB disease need medical attention.

2. What is Latent TB Infection (LTBI)?

LTBI occurs when a person has been exposed to TB germs but do not have symptoms of the disease. The TB germ is in the body but the person does not have active TB disease. The person is not infectious. They do not have to worry about passing the TB germs to someone else. The only sign of LTBI is a positive skin test and/or blood test. People with latent TB infection can go on to develop TB disease so it is important that they are seen by a healthcare provider.

3. How do you test for LTBI?

The tuberculin skin test (TST) is the most common test for TB exposure. The TST is given and read by a qualified healthcare provider. The test is done following contact with a TB case, before beginning a job in a health-related field and before some medical treatments. There are times when a TST may be positive even though the person has not been exposed to the TB germ. In that case, a blood test, called Interferon Gamma Release Assay (IGRA), may be requested. Sometimes a chest x-ray is also required.

4. How is LTBI treated?

If it is determined that you have LTBI, you may require treatment with an antibiotic. Your physician/nurse practitioner may provide a preventative treatment with medication to keep you from getting TB disease and becoming sick. Isoniazid (INH) is the medication prescribed most often. Some people may not receive this medication because of the side effects. Your physician/nurse practitioner will follow you to assess your risk of getting TB disease.

5. What is active TB disease?

Active TB disease develops when the body cannot contain the TB germs and symptoms of the disease develop. The symptoms of TB disease of the lungs include a productive cough, chest pain, unexplained weight loss, night sweats, loss of appetite, tiredness and the coughing up of blood. Symptoms of TB disease in other parts of the body depend on the area affected (e.g. swollen lymph nodes or joint pain). People with TB disease are infectious and can spread TB to others and need to be treated with several antibiotics. Untreated TB disease can cause death.



6. How do you test for active TB disease?

A physician/nurse practitioner will do further tests for TB disease, such as examination of the sputum and a chest x-ray.

7. How is active TB disease treated?

Active TB disease is treated with a combination of drugs for the first two months usually followed by two drugs as determined by your physician.

8. Can TB disease be cured?

Yes, but TB germs are strong. It is extremely important that you follow the prescribed treatment plan and finish the medication exactly as instructed or you may get even sicker.

9. Do I have to pay for the medication?

No. The medication will be provided directly to you by your physician/nurse practitioner or public health nurse.

10. Is TB medication safe?

Only a few people experience side effects from the TB medication. Your physician/nurse practitioner or public health nurse will advise you about any health-related problems you should report. Your blood will be tested monthly to check the side effects. Tell your physician/nurse practitioner or public health nurse if you don't feel well when you are taking this medication.