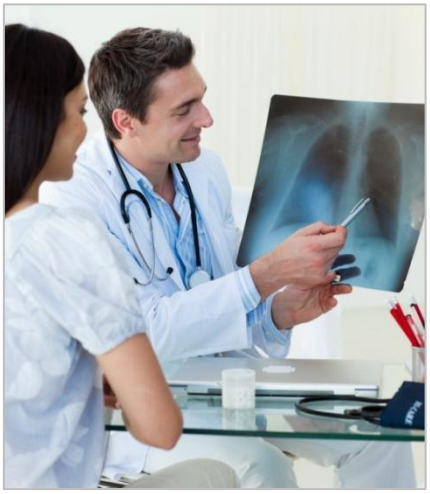
Frequently Asked Questions

Tuberculosis

1. What is Tuberculosis (TB)?

TB is caused by germs called bacteria. TB usually affects the lungs. It can be cured with prescription medicine given by a doctor.

You'll hear these two TB terms most often: **Latent TB infection** and **Active TB disease**. Anyone can get TB. You are more likely to get TB infection if you spend time with someone with TB disease, recently came to the U.S. from a country with a lot of TB , or if you spent time in a group living situation. You are more likely to get it if you have TB infection and are: very young or elderly, have a substance use disorder or medical condition that weakens your immune system, like HIV, diabetes or cancer.



2. How does TB spread?

TB spreads through the air from one person to another. TB germs spread when a person with active TB disease coughs, sneezes, speaks, sings or laughs. Anyone near the sick person can breathe in (inhale) the TB germs. You can't catch TB from clothes, dishes, food or body contact with someone who has TB. Transmission of TB is usually associated with prolonged or frequent close contact with a person with active TB disease.

3. What are the symptoms of active TB disease?

- Coughing for more than 3 weeks
- Weakness
- Chest pain
- Sweating at night
- No appetite
- Weight loss
- Fever
- Chills
- Coughing up blood or mucus

4. How do you test for TB?

A TB skin test or a blood test is used to find out if a person has latent TB infection. For the skin test, a small amount of liquid (tuberculin solution) is injected under the skin on the forearm. Then, 2-3 days later, a health care provider checks to see if there is a reaction to the liquid. It may take 8-10 weeks after coming into contact with the germ for your body to show a reaction to the TB skin test. Other tests show if you have TB disease.

5. What does it mean to have a "positive" test?

A positive TB test shows that the TB germ is present in the person's body but doesn't identify active TB disease. If it's positive, other tests, like a chest x-ray, will be done to see if it's latent TB infection or active TB disease. Additional tests will be given to people who test positive on the TB tests. Depending on results, you may be asked to get a re-test in a few months, or you may be given treatment for TB infection.

Tuberculosis (TB) Terms:

Latent TB Infection
A condition when TB germs are in the body but aren't active. People with latent TB infection have no symptoms, don't feel sick, and can't spread TB to others.

Active TB Disease
An illness caused when TB bacteria attack a part of the body, usually the lungs. A person with active TB disease can spread TB germs to others.

For More Information

Tuberculosis Control Program
http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/tb/index.htm
(213) 745-0800

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6. How is active TB disease treated?

TB disease can be treated with different anti-TB medicines. It takes at least 6 months to 1 year to kill TB disease in your body. It's very important to take all anti-TB medicine according to schedule. If you don't take the medicines correctly, the germs can become harder to get rid of. If you stop taking the medicines too soon, you can get sick again.

7. Can latent TB infection be treated?

Yes. Your health care provider can help you find the medicine that's best for you. If you have TB infection, you can take medicine to help prevent getting TB disease later. Depending on the type of treatment, it may take 3-6 months to kill the TB germs in your body.

8. Should someone with active TB disease be restricted from school or work?

People with active TB disease can spread TB germs to family and friends. If you have active TB disease, you may have to stay away from other people until you can't spread TB germs. Taking your medicines correctly will shorten the time you need to be separated from others.

People with latent TB infection aren't contagious and can't spread TB to others. As a result, going to school and work is safe.

9. What is the role of the LA County Department of Public Health in controlling the spread of TB?

The LA County Department of Public Health works with your doctors to assure they have current TB screening, testing, and treatment procedures. When a person with active TB disease is reported to Public Health, our staff conducts an evaluation that includes identifying and screening individuals that may have been exposed to active TB disease.



10. How can TB be prevented?

If you DO NOT have active TB disease

- Avoid spending long periods of time in tight spaces with people who have active TB disease or who have just started treatment.
- Ask your health care worker for a TB test if you've spent a lot of time with someone who had TB disease. If you have a negative TB test result, re-test after 2-3 months.

If you DO have active TB disease

- Take all your medicines correctly.
- Always cover your mouth when you cough and/or sneeze.