

Information leaflet for people with Latent TB Infection (LTBI)

What is tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by a germ called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. TB usually affects the lungs but can affect other parts of the body.

What are the symptoms of active TB disease?

TB disease develops slowly in the body. It may take several months for the symptoms to appear. Any of the following symptoms may be a sign of TB:

- Fever and night sweats
- Cough for more than three weeks
- Losing weight
- Blood in your sputum (phlegm) at any time

If you develop these symptoms, visit your GP (doctor) for advice.

How is TB spread?

The TB germ is usually spread in the air. Some people with TB of the lungs have infectious TB. This means that they can pass TB to other people. The germ gets into the air when someone who has infectious TB coughs, sneezes, talks or sings. Usually you need to be in close contact for a long time with someone who has infectious TB to become infected with the TB germ yourself.

Can anyone get TB?

Yes, anyone can get TB but you are at greater risk if you live in the same house as the person who is sick or if you are in very close contact with them. Only a small number of people who breathe in the TB germ get sick. This can happen within a couple of months of exposure or many years later.

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

When TB germs first enter your body, they cause latent TB infection. This means that the germs are 'asleep' in your body. If you do not have treatment, latent TB infection can become active TB disease.

Latent TB Infection	Active TB Disease
TB germs are 'asleep' in your body. This stage can last for a very long time – even many years.	TB germs are active and spreading. They are damaging your body.
You don't look or feel sick. Your chest X-ray is usually normal.	You usually feel sick. Your doctor will do special tests to find where TB is harming your body.
You can't spread TB to other people.	If the TB germs are in your lungs, you can spread TB to other people by coughing, sneezing, talking or singing.
Usually treated by taking one medicine for up to 9 months	Treated by taking 3 or 4 medicines for at least 6 months.

How is latent TB infection diagnosed?

The doctor will ask you for your medical history and carry out tests. The first test is usually a skin test (called a Mantoux test). It involves a small injection into your arm. The results will be read in 2-3 days. Then the doctor will decide what other tests you need.

What if my Mantoux test is negative?

The test is 'negative' if there is no reaction (or only a very small reaction) at the spot where you had the injection. A negative TB skin test usually means that you do not have latent TB infection. In some situations, you may need to have the test repeated. The doctor will discuss with you what follow-up you need.

What if my Mantoux test is positive?

If your skin test is 'positive', you will be sent for a chest x-ray. The doctor will discuss with you what follow-up you need. This may include taking medicine for your latent TB infection.

What does the treatment for latent TB infection involve?

Treatment involves taking medicine for up to 9 months to prevent latent TB infection from developing into active TB disease.

Are medicines for latent TB infection safe?

All medicines may have side effects. Some side effects are minor, others may be more serious. The doctor will give you information about the different tablets and their side effects. You should discuss any concerns you may have about side effects with the doctor.

Please tell the doctor at the clinic if you are taking any other medicines.

Is there anything I should avoid while on this medicine?

We strongly recommend that you don't drink alcohol while on treatment, as drinking alcohol increases the risk of damage to your liver.

Must I take medication for latent TB infection?

After talking with the clinic doctor you may decide not to take medicine for your latent TB infection. If you decide to do this, we recommend that you have a follow-up chest X-ray if your doctor advises this.

Can I carry on with my day to day activities?

There is no reason to stop any of your daily activities. Even if you have been in contact with someone who has infectious TB, you only have a small chance of developing TB disease. You have an even smaller chance of getting the type of TB that can be passed on to other people. You cannot spread latent TB infection to other people.

If you have any more questions, or if at any stage you develop symptoms of TB disease, please contact the doctor at the clinic.

You can also contact your local Public Health Department at

For more information about TB, visit www.hpsc.ie and type TB into the search box at the top right-hand corner of the screen.

