



# Tuberculosis

## What is Tuberculosis (TB)?

“TB” is a short name for a disease called tuberculosis and it is spread by tiny germs that can float in the air. When a person with TB disease coughs, shouts or sneezes they can spray these germs into the air. If another person breathes in these germs, they can get infected with the TB germs. TB can make you feel tired, have a cough, fever and night sweats. Even though 70% of those infected with TB have the germs in their lungs, TB can also infect other places in the body, such as the bone, brain or heart.

Most people who are infected have the TB germ in their body, but do not feel sick. This is called latent or “sleeping” TB infection. Others feel sick, and they have active TB disease.

## What is the difference between “sleeping” TB and active (“awake”) TB?

Latent tuberculosis infection (LTBI) is also called “**sleeping**” TB because the germs will stay asleep if your body can fight them off. You may have a positive test for TB but no signs of disease. You cannot spread “sleeping” TB to others. About one in 10 people with LTBI will develop active TB in their lifetime. If you take medications to treat “sleeping” TB, there is less chance the germs will ever wake up.

Active (**awake**) TB germs cause disease in the lungs or other parts of the body and you feel very sick. You could give TB to others by coughing, sneezing or shouting and transferring the germs in the air that others breathe.

## Symptoms that can occur in the body when TB becomes active include:

Body Location	Symptoms
Lungs	Cough, increased sputum (phlegm), coughing blood
Glands of the neck	Lumps in the neck
Bones	Pain in the bones or back
Brain	Headache, pain when moving head, stiff neck
General	Night sweats, weight loss, fever

## How do I know if I am infected with TB?

A simple test on your arm (TB skin test, also called a PPD) can tell if you have the TB germ in your body. A blood test is also sometimes used to see if a person has the TB germ in their body. You may need additional tests, such as a chest x-ray or sputum (phlegm) test.

## What should I do if I have TB?

TB can be cured! But if you do not take medication, TB can make you very sick. Even if you feel better after you begin taking the medication, **do not stop** taking the pills until your doctor or nurse tells you to stop. If you stop taking the medication too soon, the TB germ can come back and be very hard to fight off. People with active TB work very closely with health care providers to make sure they get the right treatment and feel better.

### **What is the TB skin test?**

The TB skin test is when a small amount of fluid is injected into the skin on your forearm. It makes a small bubble that disappears in about 5-10 minutes. It is very important to go back to your doctor or nurse in **2-3 days (48-72 hours)** after the injection so they can look at your arm and determine if it is a positive or negative skin test. If it is not read in this time frame, the test will need to be repeated. Do not cover the spot with a band-aid or tape. Do not rub or scratch the area.

### **What if I have a negative TB skin test?**

In most cases, if there is no bump where the testing fluid was placed, you are not infected with TB. A healthcare provider must look at the area to be sure.

### **What if I have a positive TB test?**

A positive test will look like a raised bump on your arm where the test was placed. This means that you probably have the TB germ in your body. A doctor or nurse must look at the area to measure the size. The doctor may want to do other tests to see where the TB germ is in the body. If you have sleeping infection, treatment with anti-TB medications can prevent active TB.

### **What if I had the Bacillus Calmette-Guerin (BCG) vaccine?**

*Even if you had the BCG vaccine, you can have a TB skin test.* **People who have had the BCG vaccine can still become infected with the TB germ.**

### **What is BCG?**

BCG is a vaccine given to protect people against TB. BCG is **NOT** used to prevent TB in the United States. It is usually given in parts of the world where TB is much more common. The BCG vaccine **cannot** infect you with TB.

### **Why was I given BCG?**

In countries where TB is very common, BCG is usually given to infants and very young children to try to keep them from getting very sick with TB. It does not protect adults.

### **Does BCG work?**

There are many different BCG vaccines used around the world. Some offer protection against tuberculosis (TB) in young children. It is unlikely to offer protection many years after it is given. If the BCG vaccine works at all, it will usually only protect a person for a few years.

### **If I had BCG can I still get a TB skin test?**

**Yes.** The TB skin test can detect the tuberculosis (TB) germ inside your body. If you have the TB germ inside your body, the test will be positive. A positive TB skin test does not mean that the BCG vaccine is working. If you were given BCG many years ago, a positive TB skin test now most likely means that you have the TB germ in your body.

### **Does treatment of latent (sleeping) TB work to prevent active TB?**

**Yes.** There are several types of medication that can be given to prevent active TB from occurring in people who have the TB germs in their body. This treatment is highly recommended and should be discussed with your doctor or nurse if your skin test (or blood test) shows you have the TB germ in your body.

