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What is latent tuberculosis infection (TBI)?

There are two TB-related conditions: latent TB infection and TB disease. A person with latent TB infection has TB bacteria in the body but does not have the contagious form of TB disease. The body's immune system is able to keep the infection in control. People with latent TB infection do not feel sick, have no symptoms, and cannot spread TB to others. People with active TB disease usually feel sick, have symptoms and can spread TB to others. This fact sheet discusses latent TB infection; please refer to the fact sheet on TB disease for more information on that condition.

Who gets latent tuberculosis infection?

A person who was physically close to someone with active TB disease and inhaled TB bacteria into their lungs is most likely to get latent TB infection. Other risk factors include smoking, prior residence in a country where TB is common, or living in a congregate setting (homeless shelters, migrant farm camps, nursing homes, prisons or jails).

How do people know if they have latent tuberculosis infection?

People who have one of the risk factors listed above should consider being tested for latent TB infection. This involves having either a TB skin test or TB blood test. If the TB test is positive, the person likely has latent TB infection. Additional tests such as a chest x-ray and a sample of sputum are needed to determine if the person has latent TB infection or active TB disease.

What are the symptoms of latent tuberculosis infection?

There are no symptoms of latent TB infection and a person with latent TB infection does not feel sick.

How is latent tuberculosis infection spread?

A person with latent TB infection cannot spread TB bacteria to others. People with active TB disease may spread TB bacteria to others.

What is the treatment for tuberculosis infection?

A person with latent TB infection can take drugs to kill the bacteria and prevent getting active TB disease in the future. There are several medicines used to treat latent tuberculosis infection that involve taking one or more medications for three to nine months. Talk to your health care provider about which treatment is best for you.

How can I get more information about latent TB infection?

- If you have concerns about latent tuberculosis infection, contact your healthcare provider.
- Call your local health department. You can find your local health department at vdh.virginia.gov/health-department-locator/.
- Visit the VDH Tuberculosis Program website at vdh.virginia.gov/tuberculosis/tb-infection-ltbi/.
- Visit the CDC website at cdc.gov/tb/

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