

Latent Tuberculosis Infection (LTBI)

What is Tuberculosis?

- Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by germs (bacteria) that are spread from person to person through the air. TB bacteria are put into the air when a person with TB disease of the lungs or throat coughs, sneezes, speaks or sings.
- TB usually affects the lungs but it can also affect other body parts.
- You become infected with TB when you breathe in the bacteria and it settles in your lungs or other parts of your body. This is called Latent TB Infection (LTBI). It usually takes close, long-lasting and/or frequent contact with someone who is sick with TB disease to become infected.

What is LTBI?

- People with Latent TB Infection (LTBI) have TB bacteria in their bodies, but they are not sick, have no symptoms and can't give TB to others because the bacteria are not growing (multiplying).
- TB bacteria will stay inactive as long as the body can fight them and stop them from growing.
- If the body stops fighting the TB bacteria, they will activate and start to grow. When the germs grow and spread it is called TB disease. People with TB disease can get very sick and can spread TB bacteria to other people.

How do I know if I have LTBI?

- A Tuberculin Skin Test (TST) is given and read by your health care provider. If the TST result is positive, it means the TB bacteria are in your body.
- **A positive test does not mean you are sick with TB disease.** Your health care provider will send you for more tests to see if you have TB disease or LTBI. These tests are:
 - Chest x-ray – This test will show if there is damage to your lungs.
 - Sputum test – If you have a cough, this test will show if bacteria are in your lungs.

What should I do if I have LTBI?

- About 5-10% of people with LTBI will develop TB disease at some point during their lifetime.
- Some people have a higher risk of LTBI changing to TB disease.
- LTBI can be treated with medicine.
- Discuss your risk and treatment of LTBI with your health care provider. After treatment, the risk of developing TB disease is very low.

Is there a cost for LTBI medicine?

- LTBI medication is provided free of charge through the local Public Health Unit.

What if I decide to take LTBI medicine?

- You should see your health care provider once a month, or as told by your health care provider, to make sure your treatment is going well.
- Your health care provider will order blood tests before and during treatment to check that your liver is working well.
- Take your LTBI medicine as ordered by your health care provider.

If you have questions about TB and LTBI, including treatment for LTBI, please contact your health care provider or speak with a Public Health Nurse by calling 905-546-2063

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