

Tuberculosis (TB) Infection

What is tuberculosis (TB) infection?

Tuberculosis (TB) is an infection caused by TB germs. TB is spread through the air.

It is possible to have TB germs in your body and not feel sick. This is known as TB infection, latent TB infection, or 'sleeping' TB. You cannot pass sleeping TB to other people.

If you have TB infection, you should tell any doctors you see. They will keep this information confidential. You do not need to tell anyone else.

TB infection is different to TB disease. TB disease happens when TB germs wake up or increase in number and make you sick. If this happens and TB disease is in your lungs, the germs can be spread to other people. Symptoms of TB disease may include cough, fever, night sweats and losing weight quickly.

How do I know I have TB infection?

To find out if you have TB infection your doctor or nurse may ask you to get tested. There are two types of tests that they may request a:

- TB blood test (also called a QuantiFERON Gold or IGRA), or
- tuberculin skin test (also called a TST or Mantoux test). This is a small injection into the skin on the forearm.

Will I get TB disease?

Your immune system will try to fight the TB germs. This may stop you from developing TB disease.

Around 1 in 10 people who have TB infection will develop TB disease. This may happen within months, but it may be many years after you were first infected with TB germs.

You are more at risk of your TB infection developing into TB disease if you:

- are very young (less than 5 years old) or more than 65 years old.
- have an illness which weakens your immune system such as diabetes.
- Take medication which weakens your immunity.
- are experiencing a period of stress or worry as this can weaken your immunity.

If you are concerned, you should discuss your risk of developing TB disease with your doctor.

Your doctor may recommend taking special antibiotics to stop TB disease, or regular chest x-ray monitoring (health.nsw.gov.au/tb-cxr-monitoring) to help find any signs of TB disease early.

Further information

For more information on TB, visit health.nsw.gov.au/tb

For free help in your language, call the Translating and Interpreting Service on 13 14 50.