

# TUBERCULOSIS

Rates of active TB infection are disproportionately high among First Nations communities. Learn how to prevent its spread.



## Tuberculosis

Tuberculosis (TB) is a contagious bacterial infection. TB is most often found in the lungs, but can also spread to other parts of the body, including the kidneys, spine and brain.

TB infection can usually be cured with antibiotics. If active TB is not treated, it can be severe and potentially deadly.

## How It Spreads

Tuberculosis infection is caused by a bacteria called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. It spreads from person to person **through the air** when someone who is sick with an active TB infection **talks, coughs or sneezes**.

Not everyone who is exposed to tuberculosis bacteria will become infected with TB. The following increase your risk of infection:

- 1 Close and prolonged contact with someone who has active TB
- 2 Living or working in overcrowded or poorly ventilated conditions
- 3 Health conditions that weaken your immune system, such as diabetes
- 4 Smoking cigarettes or exposure to secondhand smoke
- 5 Substance use, including heavy alcohol consumption

## Types of Infection

There are two types of TB infection.



**Latent (Sleeping) TB:** You have TB bacteria in your body, but they are inactive. Latent TB doesn't cause any symptoms and you can't spread it to others. Latent TB can become active TB if your immune system weakens.



**Active TB:** TB bacteria are growing in the body and cause you to feel sick. This may happen soon after infection or years later. Active TB is contagious.

## Symptoms

If you have active TB, you may feel sick with some of the following symptoms:

- **Persistent cough**, lasting more than two weeks, that brings up thick, cloudy and sometimes bloody mucus (sputum)
- Unexplained **weight loss**
- Weakness or lack of energy
- **Chest pain**
- **Fever** or chills and night sweats
- Loss of appetite

## Diagnosis

To diagnose a TB infection, your healthcare provider will ask questions about your health history, including recent contact with anyone who is sick with TB. They will also evaluate any symptoms you may have and order TB tests if infection is suspected.

**Skin test:**

A small amount of TB protein (called tuberculin) is injected into the arm, just below the skin. After 48-72 hours, your healthcare provider will check for a red bump at the injection site.

A positive test indicates that you likely have either latent or active TB. People who have had a TB vaccination may also have a positive test.

## Blood tests:

A small sample of your blood is sent to the lab for testing. A positive test result usually means that you have either latent or active TB. Other tests can help confirm if you have active TB.

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**Sputum tests:**

Your healthcare provider may take a sample of the mucus (sputum) that comes up when you cough. If you have active TB in your lungs or throat, lab tests can detect the bacteria.

Sputum tests can also be used to find out if you have drug-resistant TB. This information can help your healthcare provider decide on the best treatment plan for you.

**Chest x-ray:**

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**Other tests:**

Your healthcare provider may also order additional tests, including:



- Breath test
- Urine test
- Cerebrospinal fluid test

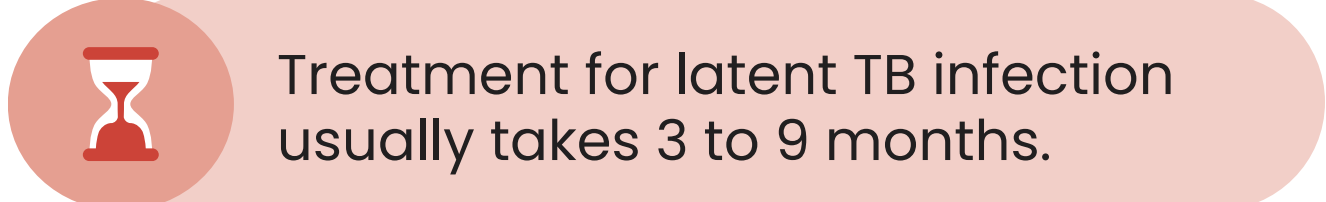
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## Treatment


TB infection, whether latent or active, can usually be cured with antibiotics.

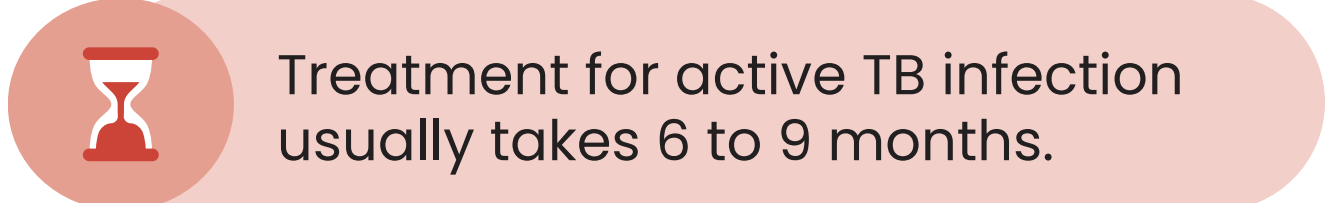
If you have a **latent TB infection**, you may be given antibiotics to prevent the TB bacteria from becoming active. This is particularly true if you are living with a health condition that weakens your immune system, such as HIV, diabetes, or cancer.

-  Treatment for latent TB infection usually takes 3 to 9 months.
- **Active TB** is treated with a combination of antibiotics. Your healthcare provider will decide on the right treatment plan for you.
-  Treatment for active TB infection usually takes 6 to 9 months.



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# Antibiotic Resistance

It is important to **take every dose** of your antibiotics as instructed, even if you feel better. Stopping treatment early can cause TB to come back – sometimes in a **drug-resistant** form that is harder to treat.

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Many clinics use a program called directly observed therapy (DOT) for TB treatment, where a healthcare provider watches you take each dose of your medication. A healthcare provider may visit you at home or you may need to go to the doctor's office daily for treatment.

# Prevention

It's important to know whether there is, or has been, TB in your community.

If you have been exposed to someone with active TB or think you may be sick with TB, talk to your healthcare provider as soon as possible. The sooner TB is found and treated, the less it can spread.

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