



BC Centre for Disease Control
An agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority

Latent TB Infection

What does a positive TB skin test or blood test mean?

A positive TB skin test or TB blood test tells us that your body has been infected with the TB germ. The test does not tell us how long the germ has been in your body or if it's active or latent (sleeping).



Latent TB infection occurs when you breathe TB germs into your lungs and your immune system stops the TB germs from multiplying and making you sick. People with latent TB infection do **not** have any symptoms. They **cannot** spread TB to other people.



Active TB disease occurs when you breathe TB germs into your lungs and your immune system is unable to stop the TB germs. The TB germs grow, multiply and make you sick.

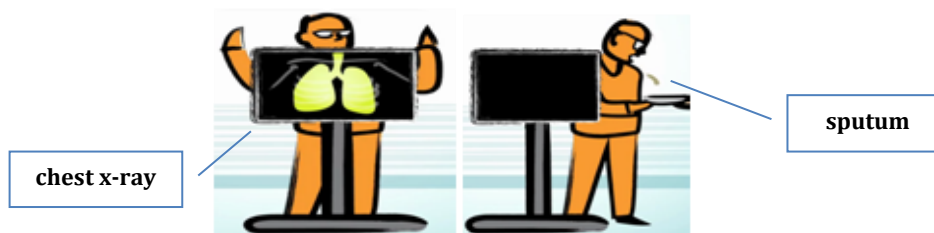
BCG & TB skin test

If you received one or more BCG vaccines after the age of one year, your TB skin test may be unreliable. Talk to your nurse or doctor.

Latent TB Infection

To know if you have **latent TB infection**, we need more information than a TB skin test or TB blood test. Your doctor or nurse will:

- Ask if you have any signs or symptoms of active TB disease.
- Send you for a chest x-ray.
- Collect samples of sputum (phlegm or mucous from the lungs), if needed.



A **TB doctor** will review your health information and your risks to determine if you have **latent TB infection**. Depending on your specific risk factors, the **TB doctor** may offer you medicine to treat latent TB infection to help you stay healthy.

Certain **medical conditions** increase your risk of TB disease. Talk to your health care practitioner if you have:

- HIV
- Chronic kidney disease
- Cancer
- Weak immune system due to medication (eg. take Enbrel for your arthritis)
- Diabetes

Latent TB Infection Treatment

If diagnosed with latent TB infection, you may be offered medication to kill the TB germ before it has a chance to wake up and make you sick with active TB disease. In Canada, there are several options for treatment that are effective in reducing your risk of developing active TB disease in the future. Your TB doctor will discuss these options with you to find one that works best for you.



TB medications in BC are free. When you start your treatment for latent TB infection, your health care provider will review medication side effects. Routine blood tests and regular visits to your nurse or doctor are necessary to monitor your health while taking treatment. There is a small risk the medication will irritate your liver. You should tell your nurse or doctor if you develop skin rashes, nausea and tiredness.

Myths & Fears

Latent TB infection is different from TB disease but people often confuse them. Sometimes people worry that you are contagious if you have latent TB infection. This is **not** true. Myths about latent TB infection can also cause shame and stigma, leading people to reject their diagnosis and not take medication that may help keep them healthy. You can help prevent TB stigma:

- Encourage people to talk about their concerns or fears about TB.
- Remind people that if they have latent TB infection, they **cannot** give the infection to other people. They can continue to do everything they usually do: work, school, travel. They do not need to be isolated or quarantined.
- Encourage people with symptoms of **active TB disease** to visit their health care practitioner for screening or testing.

Source: STAMPP, CREATE and International HIV/AIDS Alliance. (2009). *Understanding and challenging TB stigma: Toolkit for action*. Dexter-Graphics. UK.

For more information on TB transmission, latent TB infection and active TB disease, please visit www.bccdc.ca/TBVideoEnglish and watch “TB Germ: A Cunning World Traveler”. It is also available in Korean, Mandarin, Punjabi, Tagalog and Vietnamese.

