

Talking with Your Patients about Latent Tuberculosis (TB) Infection

A Conversation Guide for Healthcare Providers

Tuberculosis (TB) remains an important preventable disease in the United States. It is estimated that up to 13 million people in the United States live with latent TB infection (sometimes also called inactive TB). Because latent TB infection can develop into active TB disease, patients can become very sick and may unknowingly spread TB to others, including friends, family, or healthcare workers.

Testing and treating latent TB infection is a critical step to eliminating TB disease in the United States and protecting your community. As a trusted source of health information in your community, it's important to initiate a conversation about latent TB infection and TB disease with your patients since there may be a lack of awareness about or stigma associated with these conditions.

Here are 4 tips to start the conversation:

1

Introduce TB & Explain Latent TB Infection and TB Disease



It's important to educate your patients about latent TB infection and TB disease since many people may not be familiar with or have certain misconceptions about these conditions. Here are some quick facts you can share:

People with TB can be found in every state; where we work, where we live, where we learn, and where we spend time with family and friends.

Latent TB infection is a condition in which a person is infected with the TB bacteria but does not currently have active TB disease. People with latent TB infection do not have signs and symptoms of TB disease and cannot spread TB bacteria to others. However, if these bacteria become active and multiply, **latent TB infection can develop into TB disease.** Once active, TB can be spread from person to person through the air.

Latent TB infection can be treated to prevent TB disease. However, if left untreated, it can develop into active TB disease which can be fatal and can spread to others, including friends and family.

2

Discuss Your Patient's Risk



TB is a leading cause of deaths worldwide, and too many people still suffer from TB in the United States. There are several risk factors for TB so it's important to talk with your patients about their risk. Here is some sample language that might help:

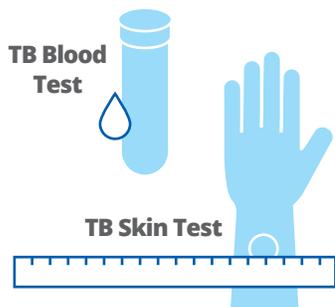
Let's discuss your risk based on areas of the world where TB is common. TB is common throughout the world, but if you're born in or frequently travel to Asia, Africa, or Latin America, you have a higher chance of getting infected with TB. This is true even if you've lived in the United States for a long time because it's more common in these regions. You may be at risk for TB even if you have received the TB vaccine (also known as the BCG vaccine), because its protection weakens over time.

Let's discuss your exposure to individuals at higher risk. You may have a higher risk for TB if you work in, currently live in, or used to live in larger group settings where TB is more common, such as homeless shelters, prisons, or jails, or if you have spent time with someone who has active TB disease.

Let's consider other health conditions you may have. Health conditions, particularly those that may weaken your immune system such as diabetes, cancer, or HIV, may increase your chance for developing active TB disease if you have been infected.

3

Explain the Testing Process



Patients may not be familiar with testing for latent TB infection, so it's helpful to explain the process. Here are some messages that may help:

There are two types of tests for latent TB infection: the TB blood test and the TB skin test. I prefer to order the blood test because it can be done in one visit, and it's the most accurate if you've been vaccinated for TB in the past.

After you get tested and receive your results, let's talk about next steps.

- If you receive a positive result, I will recommend other tests including a physical examination, chest x-ray, and other lab work to see if the TB bacteria is active or making you sick.
- If you receive a negative result and we rule out active TB disease, it is unlikely that you have latent TB infection and no immediate next steps are needed. However, we will talk about if you need to be tested again in the future.

4

Discuss Treatment Options

If your patient tests positive for latent TB infection, it's critical that you recommend shorter and more convenient treatments. While all the regimens are safe and effective, short course, rifamycin-based regimens are the preferred treatment options for latent TB infection because they have higher completion rates.

People may not seek follow-up care due to misinformation or stigma associated with this disease so it's important to help them complete the full course of treatment. Consider the following information when discussing treatment options with your patients:



Even though you do not have symptoms with latent TB infection, you can develop active TB disease, which can spread TB from person to person, can make you sick, and can even be fatal if left untreated.

Completing your treatment is important to prevent active TB disease. You may have heard of someone going through a lengthy TB treatment in the past, but short and convenient treatments are now available.

Let's discuss treatment options, any potential barriers that could disrupt your treatment plan, and community resources that can support you. Some common questions patients have about the available treatment options include:

- What are the benefits of getting treated for latent TB infection?
- Based on my lifestyle and personal health history, what treatment option would you recommend?
- How often do I need to take this medication? And how long will I be on it?
- What are the instructions for taking this medication?
- What are the side effects of this medication?
- What is the cost of this medication? Will my insurance cover treatment?

Without treatment, 1 in 10 people with latent TB infection will get sick in the future. You play a critical role in reducing the spread of TB in your community and the United States.



To learn more about TB and how you can protect yourself and others, visit www.cdc.gov/thinktesttreattb