



Tuberculosis (TB)

What is tuberculosis (TB)?

- **Latent TB infection** means the TB bacteria has infected a person, but it is inactive or dormant (quiet). The person is not sick, does not have symptoms and is not contagious.
- **TB disease** means the bacteria has become active in a person; symptoms are usually present and the infection is usually contagious. If not treated, TB disease can cause serious damage to your body. It was once the leading cause of death in the United States.

How do you get TB?

- You can get TB by breathing the bacteria into your lungs when someone with TB coughs into the air.
- It is hard to get TB unless you share close breathing space with an infected person for a long period of time on an ongoing basis. TB is most frequently transmitted within families and close workers, not casual acquaintances.
- TB is not spread by brief contact with a person with disease.

What are the symptoms and signs of TB?

Symptoms and signs vary from person to person but may include:

- Productive coughing longer than three weeks
- Sputum that is blood-tinged
- Prolonged tiredness
- Prolonged fever
- Unexplained weight loss
- Drenching night sweats

With latent tuberculosis infection, there are no symptoms or signs. Infection is detected by a positive TB skin test.

How do you know if you have TB?

- Latent TB infection is usually diagnosed by a positive reaction to a TB skin test or a positive blood test (IGRA). A positive skin test does not mean you have the tuberculosis disease.
- TB disease is suspected by symptoms, a chest x-ray and medical evaluation. It is confirmed by culture of the TB organism in sputum.



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Can you cure TB?

Yes. TB can almost always be cured.

How do you treat TB?

- By taking medication for a period of time as prescribed and monitored by a health care provider, latent TB infection can be stopped from turning into TB disease.
- TB disease is treated by medicines (usually several) taken for six to nine months or longer, depending on the situation. Regular checkups are also needed.

For more information, contact Guilford County Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health at 336-641-7777 or [GuilfordCountyNC.gov/HealthyGuilford](https://www.guilfordcountync.gov/HealthyGuilford)

Free language assistance interpreter is available upon request.