

What is latent tuberculosis infection?

Information for patients of civil surgeons in King County, WA

How do you know I have latent tuberculosis infection?

During your medical immigration exam, you had a tuberculosis (TB) blood test. The doctor took a sample of blood to see if you are infected with a type of bacteria that causes TB.

Your TB blood test was positive, so the doctor instructed you to get a chest x-ray. The doctor also asked you questions about symptoms.

The doctor reviewed your chest x-ray and determined that it was normal.



CDC/Robert Denty

A positive TB blood test, a chest x-ray, and no symptoms of active TB disease mean that you have a type of tuberculosis called latent tuberculosis infection.

When someone has latent TB infection:

- They do not feel sick.
- They cannot spread the infection to other people.
- Their latent TB infection may turn into a more serious type of TB, called active TB disease.

When someone has active TB disease:

- They may become really sick, along with cough, fever, night sweats, weight loss, and shortness of breath. They may suffer from long-term lung damage.
- They may spread the infection to others through coughing or sneezing.
- They may need to be isolated from family and friends for weeks or months.
- They may have to miss work or school until they start taking TB treatment and are no longer at risk of spreading the infection to others.

We encourage you to talk to a doctor about treatment to help you decide if it is right for you.

Frequently Asked Questions

Will these results cause my application for status adjustment (green card) to be delayed or denied?

If your doctor or Public Health thinks you might have active TB, the process could be delayed. However, having latent TB infection **will not** affect your application. The public health department and the US Citizenship & Immigration Services do not require you to complete treatment for TB infection.

Frequently Asked Questions continued

Why did my doctor report my TB infection to the public health department?

Civil surgeons are doctors that are authorized to provide medical immigration exams. All civil surgeons in the US must report tuberculosis disease and infection to the public health department.

Am I required to complete treatment for latent TB infection?

You are not required to complete treatment. However, completing treatment now will prevent your TB infection from turning into active TB disease.

Why should I do treatment now, if I feel fine?

Without treatment, latent TB infection can develop into active TB disease. TB disease is an expensive and complicated disease to treat.

What does treatment do?

Treatment for latent TB infection kills the TB bacteria in your body, so that the bacteria will not be able to 'wake up' and turn into TB disease. Getting treatment for TB infection protects yourself and your loved ones from TB disease.

What if I received the BCG (tuberculosis) vaccine when I was younger?

In many countries, children receive the bacille Calmette-Guerin (BCG) vaccine. The BCG vaccine protects you from serious types of TB that can cause death when you are a child, but does not protect you, as you get older. If your TB blood test is positive, it is NOT due to the BCG vaccine.

How long will treatment take?

Treatment consists of pills that you take once a day or once a week. The most common treatment takes 4 months, but it can take anywhere from 3 to 9 months. Your doctor can help you decide which treatment is best for you. There is another TB test, called the TB skin test, which sometimes is positive because you received the BCG vaccine, even though you do not have TB infection. This is also known as a false positive.

More information:

- For more information about the difference between active TB disease and latent TB infection: <https://bit.ly/2Yt8AwU>
- For information in languages other than English: <https://bit.ly/2Z1B0Ns>