

Audience: General Public

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Topic: Latent TB Infection

Ending Tuberculosis Requires Focus on Prevention

A new recommendation from the United States Preventive Services Task Force may make it easier to get tested for tuberculosis (TB) infection, which could help prevent future cases of TB disease.

TB was once the leading cause of death in the United States, but has faded from the memories of most Americans thanks to medical advances and public health efforts. But many people still suffer from this devastating disease, and it remains the leading infectious disease killer in the world.

“We need a new, expanded approach to eliminate TB in the United States,” says [Dr. Philip LoBue, Director of the Division of Tuberculosis Elimination at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)]. “A major part of this approach is preventing people with latent TB infection from ever developing TB disease.”

Latent TB infection is a condition in which a person is infected with the TB bacteria, but does not currently have active TB disease and cannot spread TB to others. However, if these bacteria become active and multiply, latent TB infection can turn into TB disease. CDC estimates that up to 13 million people in the U.S. have latent TB infection, and without treatment, approximately one in ten of these people will develop TB disease.

It’s hard to predict who will develop TB disease and who will not, but some people have a higher risk. CDC and the United States Preventive Services Task Force recommend screening for latent TB infection in populations at increased risk.

You should talk to your doctor about getting a TB blood test or TB skin test if:

- You had close contact with someone with TB disease;
- You are from, or often visit a part of the world where TB is common;
- You spend time in places where TB is more common, like hospitals, long-term care facilities, correctional facilities, or homeless shelters; and/or
- You have HIV, diabetes, or other health problems that make it harder for your body to fight disease.

A TB blood test or a TB skin test can find infection, and there are several options available for treating latent TB infection. [LoBue] says [CDC] is working to educate health care professionals on new options that make testing and treatment easier for patients. Treatment for latent TB infection is 90 percent effective in preventing future cases of TB disease, and is much easier and less expensive than treating someone with TB disease.

[LoBue] acknowledges the complexities of TB are challenging, but remains optimistic. “We’re fortunate to have strong public health programs that work to prevent TB disease. But we won’t be satisfied until we end TB for good.”

[For more information on tuberculosis and latent tuberculosis infection, contact your health care provider, your [state TB control program](#), or visit www.cdc.gov/tb.]

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