

# Tuberculosis (TB) INFECTION



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**TB infection** (also known as latent TB), is caused by the bacteria, *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*.

TB infection is common, with almost one in four people estimated worldwide affected. In Australia, about 5% of the population have a TB infection, and most of these people were born overseas.

For most people with TB infection, their immune system keeps the bacteria dormant (or 'sleeping').

TB infection causes no symptoms, and does not spread to other people.

In some people with TB infection, the bacteria can become active and causes TB disease. Symptoms of TB disease may include a cough that lasts more than 2 weeks, fever, night sweats, and weight loss (without trying to lose weight).

If TB disease affects the lungs, people can become very sick and spread the TB bacteria to other people.

## Who is at risk of TB infection?

Anyone can get TB infection, but it is more likely in people who live in:

- countries with high rates of TB
- households where someone has TB disease in the lungs
- some First Nations communities where TB has been diagnosed.

## How can someone find out if they have a TB infection?

Testing for TB infection can include:



a specialised blood test (called IGRA), or



a skin test (called TST) where a liquid is injected into the patient's forearm.

## Who will develop TB disease?

For most people with TB infection, their immune system will keep the TB bacteria dormant (or 'sleeping') and prevent the development of TB disease.

If TB infection is not treated, there is a risk of developing TB disease throughout their lifetime.

The risk of developing TB disease increases if the person:



is aged under 5 years, or over 65 years



recently caught the TB infection



has a weakened immune system due to other health issues (e.g. diabetes, or HIV)



takes medicine that weakens their immune system.

A specialist doctor can prescribe antibiotic medicine to treat people with TB infection and TB disease.

It is very important to take the medicine until treatment is finished.

TB testing and any follow-up care is free at Queensland Health TB services.



Further information:  
[www.health.qld.gov.au/tuberculosis](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/tuberculosis)



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