

What is the difference between tuberculosis (TB) and latent tuberculosis infection (LTBI) ?

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by TB bacteria. When someone with the bacteria in their lungs coughs or sneezes, they can send the bacteria into the air. If you breathe in the bacteria into your body, your body immune system will try to fight the bacteria.

If your body immune system is well, it will win over the bacteria...

...it will suppress the bacteria and keep it "sleeping" in your body - this is called **latent TB infection(LTBI)**. If you have LTBI, you do not have symptoms. You feel well, and you cannot pass the TB bacteria to others.

But If the bacteria wins over your body immune system...

...it can make you very sick - this is called **"active TB"**. If you have active TB, it can threaten your life and also pass the disease to your family and friends.

But...in my country, I have never heard of LTBI or its treatment...

Countries have different policies for dealing with LTBI, depending on priorities - if your country has lots of active TB, then priority may be given to finding and treating persons with active TB to prevent further transmission to others.



That may be a reason why you have never heard of LTBI or LTBI treatment in your country. In Japan, because we have less and less persons with active TB, we also try to find and treat persons with LTBI.

About Us

We are the only Non-Governmental Organization that is dedicated solely to fighting TB in Japan.

The Research Institute of Tuberculosis,
Japan Anti-Tuberculosis Association.
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WHAT IS LATENT TB INFECTION?

RESEARCH INSTITUTE OF TUBERCULOSIS
JAPAN ANTI-TB ASSOCIATION



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If I feel well, why do I have to worry about LTBI?

Because the TB bacteria can wake up one day and make you sick i.e. you may develop "active TB".

There are certain types of people who may be more likely to develop active TB, such as persons....

- ...who have recently lived with or were in close contact with a person with infectious active TB.
- ...who came from a country with high rates of active TB
- ...who have medical conditions which weaken their immune system, such as HIV/AIDS, cancer, diabetes mellitus, etc.
- ...who have lifestyles which can weaken their immune system, such as smoking, substance abuse, excessive drinking, poor diet, lack of exercise, etc.

TB bacteria can wake up one day and make you very sick, but we cannot tell exactly who will develop TB or when.

Do I need to take medicine?

If your doctor thinks you may be at a higher risk of developing active TB, the doctor will suggest you to take medications to get rid of the bacteria in your body.

There are several types of treatment courses. The most common treatment in Japan is a combination of two drugs (isoniazid and rifampicin) for 3-4 months. You can consult your doctor to decide what is the best treatment for you. Treatment for LTBI is shorter, requires less medications and less costly than treatment for active TB.

LTBI can be treated quickly. Treatment may be just 3-4 months. It is shorter, needs less medicines, and less costly than treatment for active TB.



Do I have to stop working? Do I have to stop my school?

Absolutely not. LTBI does NOT mean you have a disease. You do not need to stop working, or stop studying. You can continue to live your everyday life, like a healthy person.

You will be asked to visit your doctor once in a while to make sure you do not have any side effects from the medicines.

But what if I am told that I can no longer work or study?

If you think you are being treated unfairly because you have LTBI, you can ask for advice, in your language, from

Japan Anti-Tuberculosis Association
telephone consultation:

03-3292-1218

Every Tuesday

10:00-12:00 & 13:00-15:00

Having or treating LTBI does NOT mean you are sick. You can continue to live your everyday life