

Why is Latent TB Infection Treated?

Latent TB infection is treated to kill the dormant TB germs and prevent the patient from developing TB disease. The decision to offer treatment for latent TB infection depends upon the patient's chances of developing TB disease. Some people are more likely than others to develop TB disease once they have latent TB infection. This includes people with HIV infection, people who were recently exposed to someone with TB disease, and people with certain medical conditions.

What is the cost of the TB treatment?

All TB treatment in Malta is free of charge. This includes the medications, the visits to the TB and Infectious Disease Specialists at the main government hospital, any tests involved and directly observed therapy (DOT).

What should you do if you have symptoms suspicious of TB

If you have symptoms suspicious of TB you should seek medical advice as soon as possible. If you are in a closed centre, a doctor is available on site. If you are in an open centre or in the community you can go to a Health Centre in your catchment area, which is free of charge or, if you prefer, to a general practitioner.

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MINISTRY FOR HEALTH
PALAZZO CASTELLANIA, MERCHANTS STREET, VALLETTA, MALTA

Tuberculosis information sheet for migrants in Malta



Health Promotion & Disease Prevention Directorate

What is tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis (TB) is a serious infectious disease caused by germs that are spread from person to person through the air. TB usually affects the lungs, but it can also affect other parts of the body, such as the lymph nodes, the brain, the kidneys, or the spine. Although it is curable, a person with TB can die if they do not get treatment.

How is TB spread?

TB is spread from person to person through the air. Only people with lung or throat TB are infectious. When infectious people cough, sneeze, talk or spit they propel TB germs into the air. A person who inhales some of these germs can be infected. However it usually requires prolonged close contact with someone with the disease to get infected.

What are the symptoms of TB?

The general symptoms of TB disease include feelings of sickness or weakness, unexplained weight loss, fever and profuse night sweats. The symptoms of TB disease of the lungs also include prolonged coughing for 3 weeks or more, chest pain, and the coughing up of blood. Symptoms of TB disease in other parts of the body depend on the area affected.

TB in children

Children are less likely to have obvious symptoms of tuberculosis. Infants and young children are more likely than older children and adults to develop life-threatening forms of TB disease, like tuberculosis meningitis (TB that affects the central nervous system) and disseminated TB (TB that spreads from the lungs to other parts of the body). For this reason, prompt diagnosis and immediate treatment of tuberculosis in children is critical. Furthermore young children at risk are offered vaccination against TB, Bacillus Calmette Guerin (BCG), which is free of charge.

What is the Difference between Latent TB Infection and TB Disease?

People with latent TB infection have dormant TB germs in their bodies. They are not sick. They are asymptomatic and cannot spread the germs to others. However, they may develop TB disease in the future. They are often prescribed treatment to prevent them from developing TB disease.

People with TB disease have active TB germs in their bodies. They are sick and are usually symptomatic. People with TB disease of the lungs or throat are capable of spreading germs to others. They are given treatment to cure the TB disease.

Getting Tested for TB

Testing for TB entails a skin test called a Mantoux test with or without a TB blood test. These tests indicate whether you are infected with the TB germs. However they do not tell you whether you have TB disease. Other tests, like a chest x-ray and a sputum sample are needed to determine whether you have TB disease.

How is TB disease treated?

TB disease can be treated by taking several drugs for at least 6 months. It is very important that the treatment is completed and the drugs are taken exactly as prescribed by the doctor. If treatment is stopped or taken incorrectly, the patient will become sick again. They may also develop resistance to the drugs and thus become more difficult to treat. Furthermore, they may pass this more serious form of TB to their families and friends. If TB is not treated properly it may also lead to death. For this reason a trained care worker is assigned to each patient to supervise the treatment every day, to make sure that they take the medications properly. This is called directly observed therapy (DOT).