



TB SKIN TEST

Are you at risk?

A Tuberculosis (TB) Skin Test is used to test for TB infection. You need a TB skin test if you have spent time with **someone sick** with active TB disease or if you are **at risk of developing** TB disease if infected with TB.

TB skin testing is recommended for people who:

- Have spent time with someone sick with active TB disease.
- Have HIV infection or another medical condition such as diabetes, cancer or chronic kidney disease or are taking medications that weaken the immune system.
- Are from a place or country where TB disease is common.
- Require routine screening for immigration, workplace or school.

How is TB spread?

The TB germ is spread from one person to another person through the air when someone who is **sick with TB disease** in the lungs coughs, talks, sings, or sneezes. If you breathe in the air that has the TB germ, you may get infected with the TB germ and develop latent TB infection or active TB disease.

Latent TB infection occurs when you breathe TB germs into your lungs and your immune system **stops** the TB germs from multiplying and making you sick. The TB germs are in a sleeping (latent) state. People with latent TB infection do not feel sick, or have any symptoms. They **cannot** spread TB to other people. In fact, they do not even know the germs are in their body until they get a TB skin test.

Active TB disease occurs when you breathe TB germs into your lungs and your immune system is **unable to stop** the TB germs from growing, multiplying and making you sick.

The signs and symptoms of active TB disease are: cough 2-3 weeks or longer, bloody spit, fever, night sweats, loss of appetite, unexplained weight loss, tiredness, chest pain and shortness of breath.

Why get a TB Skin Test?

A TB skin test will help tell you if the TB germs are sleeping in your body (Latent TB Infection). If you have latent TB infection, you can talk with your health care provider about the best ways to prevent active TB disease.

The TB germ may remain sleeping in your body your entire life or it can wake up, start multiplying, and make you sick with active TB disease. There is no way to know if or when this will happen. The chance of this happening increases when a person's immune system is weak, because the immune system is what keeps the TB germs in a sleeping state and prevents them from multiplying.

The TB Skin Test

The TB skin test involves two clinic visits.

Visit 1	Visit 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Your nurse will ask you questions about your risk of TB exposure, previous TB skin tests, blood tests and treatment.If needed, the TB skin test, a small injection just below the skin on your forearm, will be given.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Your nurse will examine your arm 48-72 hours after the TB skin test is given to see if there is a reaction.They will explain the results and let you know if you need to see a doctor or nurse practitioner.

Where do I get a TB skin test?

Speak with your health care practitioner or local public health unit to see about getting a TB skin test. Most TB skin tests are free in BC. TB skin tests for work and school require a fee. You may require a medical referral from your family doctor. Visit: <http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/find/> to find a location near you.

What are possible reactions after a TB Skin Test?

Some redness at the skin test site is expected. The site may itch, but it is important that you do not scratch it, since this may cause redness or swelling that could make it hard to read the skin test. If itching is a problem, put a cold face cloth on the site and then dry it. Do not cover the site with a bandage.

A strong reaction may cause mild pain or redness that can last for several weeks. Talk to your healthcare provider if you have a fever, swelling in your arm or swollen lymph nodes in your armpit. It is important to always report serious or unexpected reactions to your healthcare provider.

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting your TST because there is an extremely rare possibility, less than 1 in a million, of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. Anaphylaxis has been very rarely reported following a TST with Tubersol®. These reactions can occur in people without a history of a TST. This may include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. Should this reaction occur, your healthcare provider is prepared to treat it. Emergency treatment includes administration of epinephrine (adrenaline) and transfer by ambulance to the nearest emergency department. If symptoms develop after you leave the clinic, call 9-1-1 or the local emergency number.

TB Skin Test Result

The area where the skin test was given will be examined for a reaction. The nurse will measure this reaction; the TB skin test is **positive** if the reaction is 10mm or larger. In certain situations, we use 5mm as a positive test. Your health care practitioner will explain your result.

- A **negative TB skin test** usually means that you do not have TB germs in your body. Most people do not need further testing. Your nurse or doctor will let you know if you require further testing.
- A **positive TB skin test** means you may have the TB germs in your body. Before a diagnosis is made, more testing is needed. Please refer to the BCCDC pamphlet "Latent TB Infection" for more information on a positive TB skin test.