

Tuberculin Skin Test (TST)

What is a tuberculin skin test?

A tuberculin skin test (also called a Mantoux skin test) is used to find out if you have been infected with *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. This is the bacteria (germ) that causes tuberculosis (TB).

The tuberculin test looks for latent TB infection, not active TB disease. It is not able to tell you when you were infected with the TB germs.

What is latent TB infection?

Latent TB infection is when the TB germs are present in your body but are not growing or causing harm (they are inactive). A latent TB infection doesn't make you feel sick and you can't spread it to others.

However, latent TB infection can become active disease in the future if it's not treated.

If someone has a latent TB infection and does not complete treatment, there is a 1 out of 10 chance they will develop active TB disease.

What is active TB disease?

Active TB disease means that the TB germs are growing, and you can spread TB disease to other people. TB is most often found in the lungs, but it can also be found in other parts of the body. When you have active TB disease, you usually feel sick. Some common symptoms of active TB disease are:

- Cough and fever
- Loss of weight
- Night sweats

How is the tuberculin skin test done?

The tuberculin skin test is done over 2 appointments that are 2 to 3 days apart.

First appointment: A nurse will inject a testing solution under the skin on the lower part of your arm.

Second appointment: A nurse will check your arm to see if your skin reacts to the injected solution.

Some people will not react to the injection and there will be no redness or swelling of the skin. Some people will have a hard swelling surrounded by a red area. A nurse will measure the reaction to see if it shows you have a latent TB infection.

Please come to the second appointment, even if you don't see a reaction on your arm.

What do the results mean?

A **negative** test result usually means you don't have a latent TB infection. If you have a negative test result, you may need to have the test again at a later time.

A **positive** test result usually means that you have a latent TB infection. But it can also mean that you've had a TB vaccine (also called a BCG vaccine) or have had an infection with a germ like the one that causes TB.

If you have a positive test result, you'll:

- Have a chest x-ray and may have other tests
- Be referred to your family doctor or Tuberculosis Services at Alberta Health Services

Keep a copy of your test results in case you need to show them to your healthcare provider or your employer one day.

Is the skin test safe?

The test is very safe, including if you're pregnant or have had the BCG vaccine.

You shouldn't have the test if you have:

- Symptoms of active TB disease
- Already had a positive tuberculin skin test in the past
- Been treated for TB in the past

Are there any side effects of the tuberculin skin test?

Most people don't have side effects, but you may have some bruising, itching, or feel sore where you had the needle.

It's important to stay at the clinic for 15 minutes after the test. Some people may have a rare but serious allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. If anaphylaxis happens, you will get medicine to treat the symptoms.

It's rare to have a serious reaction. Call Health Link at 811 to report any serious or unusual reactions.

What is the follow-up care?

To help with itching, put an ice pack or something cold over the area.

Pat your arm dry after you have a bath or shower.

Don't:

- Cover the test area with a bandage
- Scratch, wipe, or scrub the skin around the test area
- Put cream or lotions on the test area

When is my next appointment?

Your appointment is on _____ at _____.

Please come to this appointment, even if you don't see a reaction on your arm.

I have a fear of needles. How can I prepare for my immunization?

Many adults and children are afraid of needles. You can do many things before, during, and after immunization to be more comfortable.



Scan the QR code, visit ahs.ca/vaccinecomfort, or call Health Link at 811 for information.

For more information



Call the clinic where you had the test done



Call Health Link at **811**