

Tuberculosis

TB Skin Test (Mantoux)

What is it?

The TB skin test is a way to find out if you have been infected with the TB bacteria. The Mantoux test is the most common method of testing for TB. For this test, a small amount of testing material is injected just below the top layers of skin, usually on the arm. Two or three days later a health care worker checks the arm to see if a bump has developed. The appearance and size of the bump determines the result of the test. If there is a bump, the health care worker will measure it and decide if the test is positive.

What does a “NEGATIVE” reaction mean?

A negative tuberculin reaction means that either there are no TB bacteria in the body or that the body has forgotten to react. Depending on your age, employment or health status a second test may be needed (see “two-step” below).

What does a “POSITIVE” reaction mean?

A positive tuberculin reaction means that at one time TB bacteria have entered the body. This means that either you have a TB infection now or you have had a TB infection in the past. Your health care provider will need to determine if you have inactive TB infection or active TB disease and will send you for an x-ray and possibly a test of your mucous or phlegm.

You may be prescribed medication, which will slowly fight the TB bacteria and allow your body to heal. TB drugs are provided free of charge from the Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit. Having a positive TB skin test does not mean you are infectious. You are only able to pass the bacteria to other people if you are experiencing active signs of TB disease like coughing, night sweats, chills, weakness, weight loss and chest pain.

What is a “two-step” TB skin test?

Sometimes the immune system of some individuals cannot “remember” past TB infection. This often occurs in the elderly and in persons whose immune system is weak. These people can have no bump after the first TB skin test. A second TB skin test given at least one week to one year after the original test may produce a much greater response. This response is called the “booster effect”. A two-step is often required to get an accurate baseline for people who are going to be working or volunteering in a health care field.

What do I do if I have more questions?

Call the Health Unit at 1-800-660-5853 or visit our website at www.healthunit.org.

Source: Tuberculosis Information for Health Care Providers