

The Victorian Tuberculosis Program

I have a positive skin test for Tuberculosis

What does a positive TB skin test mean?

A skin test for Tuberculosis (TB) is also called a Mantoux test or Tuberculin skin test (TST).

A Public Health Nurse measured your arm where the injection was given and a swollen lump has developed after 2-3 days. This means you have a positive skin test.

Your positive skin test may indicate any of the following:

- That you have been infected by the TB germ but you have not become sick because your immune system is able to control the germ. Not all the TB germs are killed by your immune system and some remain sleeping in your body.
- That the sleeping TB germs have become active and you need to have more tests to look for the active germs in your body
- That you have been immunised for TB in the past with a BCG vaccination (which leaves a scar on your arm), or
- That you have previously had TB and you may or may not have been treated for this in the past.

If you have a positive skin test result you will be offered further medical follow-up.

This may include:

- A **chest x-ray** to see if there are any marks or scars on your lungs.
- A type of **blood test** known as an IGRA which can help tell the difference between previous BCG vaccination and TB infection. In Australia the IGRA test is called Quantiferon-TB Gold®
- **Referral** to a specialist doctor, who will recommend any further tests or treatment.
- A **sputum** (phlegm) test if you are experiencing any symptoms of TB disease such as a cough, fever, sweats, tiredness or weight loss.

If the IGRA test is **negative** and your chest x-ray is **clear**, you can be reassured that the positive TST is most likely due to previous BCG vaccination.

If the blood test is **positive** and your chest x-ray is clear, this indicates you have probably been exposed to TB in the past. TB germs can live in your body for long periods of time without making you sick. This is called **latent (sleeping) TB**. You cannot pass these sleeping germs on to anyone else.

People with latent TB infection have a 10% risk of developing active TB during their life. If the TB germs wake up and become active or multiply in your body, you can develop active TB disease. Some medical conditions and treatments can increase this risk.

If you are referred to a specialist doctor, they will examine you and discuss a plan: this may be further chest x-rays for some years or a course of treatment with an antibiotic called Isoniazid or Rifampicin. This medicine will reduce the chance of you ever becoming sick with active TB.

Once you have a positive skin test, it is likely to remain positive if you have the test again in the future. If you are ever asked to have another TST, advise the doctor or nurse of your previous positive result and always keep a record of your skin test result.

Remember:

- You are not sick with TB, there is no reason to stop any of your daily activities
- You cannot pass sleeping TB germs on to your family and friends
- A Victorian Tuberculosis Program Nurse will be in contact with you and you will be advised if further follow-up is required.

For further information contact the Victorian Tuberculosis Program on 9342 9478 between 9am - 5pm Monday to Friday.



The Victorian Tuberculosis Program is a service of The Royal Melbourne Hospital

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