

# I have a positive skin test for tuberculosis

## Public health information

### 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 two to three days. This means you have a positive skin test.

#### Your positive skin test may mean:

- that you are infected with the TB germ, (this is called latent TB infection), or
- 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 disease and/or treatment.

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 **blood test** called a Quantiferon TB Gold which can help tell the difference between previous vaccination (called BCG) and TB infection
- **referral** to a specialist doctor, who will recommend any further tests or treatment
- a **sputum** (spit) test if you are experiencing any symptoms of TB disease such as a cough, fever, sweats, tiredness or weight loss.

If the blood test is **negative** and your chest x-ray is **clear**, 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 **TB infection**. TB germs can live in your body without making you sick; this is called latent TB infection.

Latent infection means you have inactive or sleeping TB germs in your body; you cannot pass these germs on to anyone else and you are **not sick with TB**.

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

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. This medicine will reduce the chance of you ever becoming sick with tuberculosis disease.

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 on the infection to others.
- A Department of Health TB Nurse will be in contact with you and you will be advised if further follow-up is required.

For further information contact the TB Control Section on 1300 651 160.