



Testing & Diagnosis

Testing for TB Infection

There are two kinds of tests that can be used to help detect TB infection – the TB skin test (TST) and TB blood tests. A positive TB skin test or TB blood test only tells that a person has been infected with TB bacteria. **It does not tell whether the person has latent TB infection ([../basics/default.htm#ltbi](#)) (LTBI) or has progressed to TB disease ([../basics/default.htm#activetb](#)).** Other tests, such as a chest x-ray and a sample of sputum, are needed to see whether the person has TB disease.

- **Mantoux tuberculin skin test**

The TB skin test (Mantoux tuberculin skin test) is performed by injecting a small amount of fluid (called tuberculin) into the skin in the lower part of the arm. A person given the tuberculin skin test must return within 48 to 72 hours to have a trained health care worker look for a reaction on the arm.

- [Tuberculin Skin Testing \(../publications/factsheets/testing/skintesting.htm\)](#) (fact sheet)
- [Tuberculosis and Pregnancy \(../publications/factsheets/specpop/pregnancy.htm\)](#) (fact sheet)
- [Mantoux Tuberculin Skin Testing Materials \(../education/Mantoux/default.htm\)](#)

- **TB blood tests**

TB blood tests (also called interferon-gamma release assays or IGRAs) measure how the immune system reacts to the bacteria that cause TB. If your health care provider or local health department offers TB blood tests, only one visit is required to draw blood for the test. The QuantiFERON®-TB Gold test (QFT-G), QuantiFERON®-TB Gold In-Tube test (GFT-GIT) and T-SPOT®.TB test are three Food and Drug Administration approved TB blood tests. Test results are generally available in 24-48 hours.

- [General information about TB blood tests \(bloodtest.htm\)](#)
- [Interferon-Gamma Release Assays \(../publications/factsheets/testing/IGRA.htm\)](#) (fact sheet)

Who Should Get Tested for TB

Persons should get tested for TB by their doctor or local health department if they

- have spent time with a person known or suspected to have active TB disease; or
- have HIV infection or another condition that weakens the immune system and puts them at high risk for active TB disease; or
- have symptoms of active TB disease; or
- are from a country where active TB disease is very common (most countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and Russia); or
- live somewhere in the United States where active TB disease is more common such as a homeless shelter, migrant farm camp, prison or jail, or some nursing homes); or
- inject illegal drugs.

Testing for TB in BCG-Vaccinated Persons

[BCG \(../vaccines/default.htm\)](#), or bacille Calmette-Guérin, is a vaccine for TB disease. Many persons born outside of the United States have been BCG-vaccinated. BCG vaccination may cause a positive reaction to the TB skin test, which may complicate decisions about prescribing treatment. Despite this potential for BCG to interfere with test results, the TB skin test is not contraindicated for persons who have been vaccinated with BCG. The presence or size of a TB skin test reaction in these persons does not predict whether BCG will provide any protection against TB disease. Furthermore, the size of a TB skin test reaction in a BCG-vaccinated person is not a factor in determining whether the reaction is caused by [latent TB infection \(../basics/default.htm#ltbi2\)](#) (LTBI) or the prior BCG vaccination.

TB blood tests (interferon-gamma release assays or IGRAs), unlike the TB skin tests, are not affected by prior BCG vaccination and are not expected to give a false-positive result in persons who have received prior BCG vaccination.

Diagnosis of TB Disease

Persons suspected of having TB disease should be referred for a medical evaluation, which should include

- Medical history,
 - Physical examination,
 - Test for TB infection (TB skin test or special blood test),
 - Chest radiograph (X-ray), and
 - Appropriate laboratory tests
- [Diagnosis of TB \(../publications/factsheets/testing/diagnosis.htm\)](#) (Fact sheet)

Related Links

- [State TB Control Offices \(../links/tboffices.htm\)](#)

For Patients

- [TB - General Information \(../publications/factsheets/general/tb.htm\)](#) (Fact sheet)
- [What You Need to Know About the TB Skin Test !\[\]\(33006de4dd11f8c729ca8ca0fde0352f_img.jpg\) \(../publications/pamphlets/TB_skin_test.pdf\)](#) (Pamphlet - PDF 202k)
- [Questions and Answers About TB \(../publications/faqs/default.htm\)](#)

For Health Care Providers

- [Testing and Diagnosis Fact sheets \(../publications/factsheets/testing.htm\)](#)
- [Testing and Diagnosis Guidelines \(../publications/guidelines/Testing.htm\)](#)
- [TB Testing *MMWRs* \(../publications/reportsarticles/mmwr/mmwr_testing.htm\)](#)
- [Education and Training Products \(../education/default.htm\)](#)

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