

Tuberculin Skin Test (TST)

Fact Sheet

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What is a Tuberculin Skin Test (TST)?

The TST is used to find out if someone has been exposed to the TB germ. The test involves putting a small needle just under the skin of the forearm and injecting a small amount of a special solution (tuberculin). After 48-72 hours the nurse must examine the test area and look for an 'induration' or hard bump in the area of the injection site. The TST is 'positive' if a bump of a certain size has developed where the needle was given.

What does it mean if my TST is positive??

A positive TST does not mean that you are sick with tuberculosis. In most cases it means that you may have been exposed to the TB germ at some time during your life but the TB germs in your body are inactive or sleeping; this is called Latent TB Infection (LTBI). However you will need to see a nurse or doctor to be certain.

You will need to be examined by a nurse or doctor and have further tests such as blood tests, chest x-ray and sputum samples to be sure you have LTBI and you are not sick with active tuberculosis. If you have LTBI you will usually be recommended to take medication to prevent the LTBI from becoming active TB and making you sick.

Who should not have a TB skin test?

- Anyone who has had a positive TST in the past.
- Anyone who has had active TB disease in the past or history of treatment for LTBI or active TB disease in the past.
- Anyone who is allergic to the tuberculin solution or allergic to any vaccine that contains the same ingredients as the tuberculin solution.
- Anyone with extensive burns, eczema or other skin conditions where the TB skin test is to be given.
- Anyone who has received a live virus vaccine (e.g. MMR, shingles, or chickenpox) in the 4 weeks before the TB skin test is given. A TB skin test can be done on the same day as live vaccines. If not given on the same day, the TB skin test must not be done until at least 4 weeks after the live vaccines. This is because the live vaccines can decrease the response to the TB skin test.
- Anyone with a major viral illness (e.g. mononucleosis, mumps, measles) in the past month. Anyone with a mild viral illness, such as the common cold, in the past month can receive their TB skin test.

Note: The following are **NOT** contraindications for TB skin testing: pregnancy, breastfeeding, past history of BCG vaccination, vaccination with a non-live vaccine in the past 4 weeks or treatment with low-dose steroids.

