



# The Tuberculin Skin Test

Tuberculosis (TB) infection occurs when a person breathes in TB bacteria. In most cases, this is because they have had exposure to someone with TB disease (in the lungs). In healthy individuals the immune (defence) system can control the infection by keeping the bacteria inactive. This is called **latent TB infection (LTBI)**. People with LTBI are not sick and cannot spread TB to others. If left untreated, about 10 percent of people will develop **TB disease**. This can affect any part of the body but usually affects the lungs. In Australia, TB disease and latent TB infection can be treated.

## What is the Tuberculin Skin Test (TST)?

The TST, also known as the Mantoux test, is a skin test to detect if you have been infected with TB bacteria.

## Why is it done?

- To detect LTBI in a person who may have been exposed to someone diagnosed with TB disease
- Before employment in a healthcare facility
- Before travel to a high-TB risk region for work if requested by the employer
- In some situations, a TST may be required before a Bacille Calmette-Guerin (BCG) vaccination for infants over 12 weeks.

## How is it done?

A small amount of purified protein from dead TB bacteria is injected under the top layer of the skin on the forearm using a sterile disposable needle and syringe. A small blister will appear at the site; it will disappear within 20 minutes. There may be a small amount of blood at the needle site.

You will need to return to the clinic three days later to have the injection site assessed by a nurse for any reaction.

## Before you have the TST

It is important that you tell the nurse if you:

- Have ever been treated for TB
- Have had a TST test done previously and what the result was
- Have had a viral illness in the last week
- Have an illness that affects your immune system
- Take any medication/treatments that affect your immune system
- Received any vaccinations in the past month.

## Care of the injection site

- It is important that you do not scratch or rub the injection site.
- Leave the area open; do not cover with any dressing, cream or ointment.
- If blisters develop and cause discomfort, apply a cool compress to the area.
- You can continue your normal activities after having the TST, including showering, swimming and sport.



## Possible side effects

The TST is a simple and safe test and side effects are uncommon but may include:

- Swelling, redness and itchiness at the injection site that can take a few weeks to clear
- Painful swelling, blistering or ulceration may occur in rare cases. Blistering or ulcerations will heal with little scarring.

## What do the results mean and what happens next?

The nurse will review your injection site and tell you the result.

### Negative result

If the lump is below a certain size the result of the test is negative. Usually this means that you have not been infected with TB bacteria.

You may be recommended to have a repeat test in the future depending on why the test was initially performed or you may be advised that no further follow-up is required.

A false negative can occur if you are unwell, immunosuppressed or have had a recent live vaccination.

### Positive result

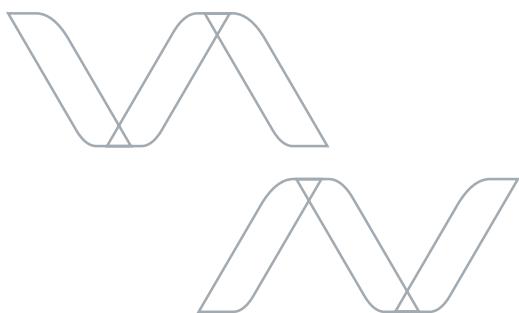
If the lump is above a certain size, the result of the test is positive. It means that you may have been infected with TB bacteria.

If your result is positive a chest X-ray will be recommended and an appointment will be arranged for you to be reviewed by one of our doctors to discuss your results.

Some people with TB infection will be offered medication to prevent them from getting TB disease.

If your test is positive, you will be advised not to have another TST in the future.

For more information about the  
Tuberculin Skin Test, see the  
[Healthy WA website](#)



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