

Tuberculin Skin Test (TST)

Fact Sheet

What is a tuberculin skin test or TST?

The tuberculin skin test (TST) is a simple test used to find out if you have been infected with *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, the bacterium that causes tuberculosis (TB). The TB skin test is not a vaccine.

A positive skin test shows that you may have latent tuberculosis Infection (LTBI). More tests will be needed to screen for active TB disease to make sure that the TB bacteria is not active and making you sick. These tests usually include a check-up by a health care provider for signs and symptoms of active TB disease, a chest x-ray and sputum collection.

Who should receive a TST?

- The TST is most often used to check for TB infection in people who have been in contact with an individual with a diagnosed case of active TB.
- It is also used to screen workers in the health care profession, residents in institutions, certain travellers and immigrants from countries where there is a high rate of TB.
- It is okay to get a TB skin test even if you have had a Bacille Calmette-Guerin (BCG) vaccination in the past. Getting the BCG vaccine as a baby will not result in a positive TB skin test as an adult.

Who should **NOT** have a TST?

- Anyone who has
 - a major viral infection, e.g. measles, mumps, varicella
 - received measles or other live virus immunization within the past 4 weeks (though you may receive a TST on the same day as vaccination with a live-virus vaccine)
- Anyone who has had
 - a severe allergic reaction (e.g. blistering) to **Tubersol®**, or any of its components, in the past - *M. tuberculosis* protein, polysorbate 80, phenol, phosphate buffered saline .
Tubersol does not contain latex.
 - a documented positive TST in the past
 - a documented active case of TB or well-documented history of adequate treatment for TB infection or disease in the past
 - extensive burns, eczema or rash present on forearms (use alternate site)

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How is the TST administered and read?

The nurse injects a tiny amount of tuberculin serum into the inner surface of your forearm with a fine needle. It is not a painful procedure.

- The injection should produce a pale elevation of the skin called a wheal.
- The skin test reaction must be read between 48 and 72 hours after administration.
- The nurse will check for a raised, hardened area (induration) on your forearm and record the size of the induration, if there is any.

What are the common side effects of TST?

Generally there are no side effects, but a few people may have redness, swelling and itching at the site of the injection for up to a few months after TST.

What is the Two-Step TST?

- The two-step TST means you will receive two TST tests, one to four weeks apart.
- If the first reading is positive, a second TST is not necessary.
- It is given to establish a baseline reading for anyone who may need repeated testing in the future, such as health care or correctional service workers.
- The two-step TST only needs to be performed once if properly performed and documented. It never needs to be repeated.
- Any future TST can be a one-step regardless of how long it has been since the last TST.

What else do I need to know?

- Avoid scratching or rubbing the site; keep it clean and dry; avoid putting lotions or bandages on it; a cold compress may be helpful.
- It is safe to have a TST if you are pregnant.

When should I seek medical attention after TST?

- If you experience any unusual side effects, seek medical attention & notify us.
- Go to Emergency Department right away, or call 911, if you develop swelling of the face or neck, problems breathing, hives and / or itchy skin after the TST.

Your Record of Protection

After you receive a TST, make sure your health care provider updates your personal immunization record. Keep it in a safe place. Please inform us of any immunizations not received from public health.

Other Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or call our Communicable Disease Program at 613-966-5500 x349. Toll Free 1-800-267-2803 | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | www.hpepublichealth.ca

References

- Canadian Tuberculosis Standards 7th Edition 2013 Public Health Agency of Canada.
- CDC Sept 2012. Tuberculosis (TB) Fact Sheet
- Tubersol Oct 2012 Product monograph

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