

# The Mantoux test

(Tuberculin skin test)

## Why do a skin test?

Sometimes people can become infected with tuberculosis (TB) germs without getting the actual disease. The Mantoux test (tuberculin skin test) can show if the person has ever been infected by TB germs. TB infection does not mean the person has the disease, but if someone has been infected there is a chance they might get sick with TB in the future.

## Who needs a skin test?

- Recent contacts of someone who has active TB disease. This could be family members, friends, or co-workers.
- Those who have a chest X-ray suggesting that they have had untreated TB disease in the past.
- People who have lowered immunity such as HIV infection or certain medical conditions (renal failure, certain cancers, diabetics, before starting steroids or other immunosuppressive drugs).
- People who are required to be tested for employment reasons or as part of a school screening program (providing they have not had a previous positive Mantoux test).
- Before administering a BCG to infants greater than 6 months of age.
- People about to undergo organ donation.
- People travelling to a high risk country.

## The Mantoux test

A Mantoux test is a simple and safe test. A small amount of tuberculin purified protein derivative (Tubersol®) is injected just under the top layer of skin on a person's arm using a small sterile needle and syringe. The skin reaction (lump) is measured 2 to 3 days later and the result recorded.



## Possible side effects

Side effects are uncommon. However, a person who has been exposed to TB germs may occasionally have a sizeable reaction, which may cause some discomfort. This swelling should disappear in about 2 weeks.

The reaction can get itchy. It is best not to scratch the arm – a cold compress can help relieve any itching.

## What does a negative result mean?

If the lump is below a certain size the result of the test is negative. Usually this means that the person has not been infected with TB germs. However, under some circumstances it can be negative even when someone has been infected. This can happen if the exposure to TB has been in the last few weeks and the body has not had time to develop a reaction or if the body's defences are weakened and unable to react to the skin test. In these situations the test may need to be repeated or interpreted differently.

## What does a positive test mean?

It means that the person is infected by TB germs, but does not mean that he or she has TB disease. A Mantoux positive person cannot pass TB onto anyone else unless there is progression at some stage to active pulmonary TB disease.

## How can a person be infected and not have TB disease?

After TB germs enter the body, in most cases, body defences control the germs by building a wall around them, the way a scab forms over a cut. The germs can stay alive inside these walls for years in an 'inactive' or latent state. While TB germs are inactive, they cannot harm the person and **they cannot spread to other people**. The person is infected but not sick and is unlikely to be aware that he or she is infected.

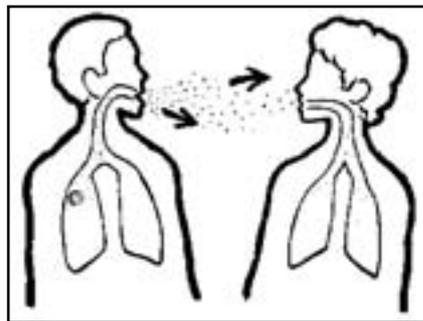
## What is TB disease?

Tuberculosis is an infectious disease which usually affects the lungs but can affect other parts of the body. It is spread from person to person through the air by droplet infection. It is possible to get TB disease shortly after the germs enter the body, if body defences are weak. It is also possible for inactive TB germs to become active when body defences are weakened. This may be years later due to ageing, a serious illness, developing diabetes, kidney disease, certain cancers, drug or alcohol abuse, or HIV infection.

## What happens after the Mantoux skin test is read?

If the test is negative, no further testing is needed at this time, but you may need another test a few months later, depending on the reason for the test.

If the test is positive, a chest X-ray and physical examination will be needed to ensure there is no sign of active disease. If there are no signs of active TB the doctor will discuss the possibility of taking medication to prevent the development of TB disease. The benefits of taking the medication depend on the person's age, health and underlying risk of TB disease.



TB germs spread through the air

### For further information contact the TB Clinic in your region:

Alice Springs	8951 7548	Darwin	8922 8804
Katherine	8973 9049	Nhulunbuy	8987 0282
Tennant Creek	8962 4259		

or [www.nt.gov.au/health/cdc](http://www.nt.gov.au/health/cdc)