

# **TUBERCULIN SKIN TESTING (TST)**



## **1. What is a tuberculin skin test?**

This test is used to aid in detection of tuberculosis. Tuberculin skin test (5TU PPD) is made from protein, which is part of the tuberculosis (B) organism. The test can show if you have been exposed to TB at any time in the past; it does not diagnose active TB disease.

## **2. Who should have a TST?**

A TST is commonly used to screen people:

- who have been in contact with someone who has active TB disease
- who require routine screening before beginning a health care job or prior to entering health care training programs in school
- before beginning medical treatments that may cause the immune system to be weakened

## **3. How is the TST administered?**

A small amount (0.1 ml) of fluid called Tuberculin purified protein derivative (PPD) is injected under the skin of the forearm. For a short time after the injection, a small raised area under the skin may appear at the site of the injection.

## **4. How is the TST read?**

A nurse will examine the test site 48-72 hours after the test to see if there is a positive or negative reaction. The result of the test may vary from no reaction at all to a red raised area with some surrounding redness. Occasionally someone very sensitive to the tuberculin may have some blistering at the site of the test. This will usually clear up without treatment.

If your test is negative, a second test will be performed one to four weeks after the first test if required.

## **5. What if the TST is positive?**

If the TST is positive, your physician will be notified. You will be assessed for signs and symptoms of active TB disease. This may include a blood test called an Interferon Gamma Release Assay (IGRA), a chest x-ray and sputum samples.

Sometimes the TST can be positive even if you have not been exposed to TB. Vaccination with Bacillus Calmette-Guerin (BCG) vaccine, immune suppression and advanced age can cause "false" skin reactions.

## **6. What is BCG vaccine?**

Prior to 1979, many children in Newfoundland and Labrador were vaccinated with BCG to prevent them from getting infected with TB.

### ***7. How do I take care of my arm after the TST?***

- Do not cover the area with a bandage or tape.
- Do not rub or scratch the area.
- If the area becomes itchy, place a cool cloth on it.

### ***8. Who should not receive a TST?***

- Persons who have a documented positive TST in the past.
- Persons with an allergic/severe reaction to a previous TST.
- Persons with documented active/previously treated TB.
- Persons sick with fever or infection.
- Persons who have had a live-virus vaccine in the past 4 weeks.