

# Tuberculosis (TB) Skin Test

## What is tuberculosis (TB)?

- Tuberculosis (TB) is caused by bacteria that spread when a person with infectious TB coughs, sneezes or has close face-to-face contact with other people.
- People with TB germs in their lungs can spread the germs to other people.
- TB germs grow in the lungs and can permanently damage the lungs.
- TB germs can also infect other parts of the body like the glands, kidneys, bones and brain.
- **Tuberculosis is the leading cause of death from an infectious disease in the world.**

## What is TB infection?

- **It is when you have breathed the TB germs into your lungs, but they are not growing.**
- You will not feel sick or pass the germs onto others.
- The germs may become active in the future and cause TB disease.

## What is TB disease?

- **It is when the germs become active and grow.**
- You may or may not feel sick when the disease is active, but it is important to remember that you can spread the TB germs to those around you.

## Symptoms of TB include:

- Fever and chills;
- Chronic cough lasting longer than 4 weeks, coughing up blood;
- Night sweats;
- Weight loss;
- Poor appetite; and
- Tiredness.

**For more information contact your local public health office, your physician, nurse practitioner, HealthLine online or by calling 811.**

## What is a TB skin test and why do I need it?

- TUBERSOL® is indicated to aid diagnosis of tuberculosis infection (TB) in persons at increased risk of developing active disease.
- The skin test is a way to tell if you have TB bacteria in your body.
- You can have TB germs in your body and not feel sick.
- **A skin test is not an immunization against TB.**

## Who should not receive a TB skin test?

- Persons who have reacted positively to a previous TB skin test.
- Individuals who have had an allergic reaction to any TUBERSOL® ingredients.
- Individuals who have had a severe reaction (e.g., necrosis, blistering, anaphylactic shock or ulcerations) to a previous tuberculin skin test.
- Individuals with documented active tuberculosis or a clear history of treatment for TB infection or disease.
- Individuals with extensive burns or eczema because of a greater likelihood of adverse or severe reactions.
- Persons who received a live vaccine must wait one month before getting a TB skin test done.
- **NOTE: Previous BCG vaccination is not a contraindication to tuberculin testing.**

## Where can I be tested?

- You can be tested for TB at your local health unit, or your doctor can arrange for you to have a test.
- You can also be tested at the TB clinic in Saskatoon or Regina.

## How is the TB skin test done?

It is a 2-step test.

- In the first step, a fine needle injects a small amount of a harmless test substance under the layers of skin on your forearm. Although there is minimal risk, you will be asked to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes following the skin test to see if you experience an allergic reaction. You may get a temporary raised area (a 'bleb') where the needle was given. This is normal. If this area gets itchy, do **not** scratch it.
- The second stage of the test is done two days later. You must go back to have your reaction to the TB test measured. When your skin test is measured, your test will be called negative or positive.

## What do the results mean?

- If your skin test is negative, you probably do not have TB bacteria in your body. You may be asked to be re-tested in 6-12 weeks if you have had contact with someone with active TB disease.
- If you have a positive skin test a chest x-ray will be done to see if your lungs are affected. If your x-rays are abnormal, or you are feeling sick, you will be asked to give a sputum (spit) sample to test for TB germs.
- You will need to have more tests to determine which of the 3 categories below apply to you:
  1. **You had a TB vaccine in the past.**  
You may have had a vaccine against TB, known as a BCG, when you were a child. It is unlikely your reaction to the skin test will be large, as the effects of this vaccine decrease with time.
  2. **You have a TB Infection.**  
You have TB germs in your body but they are **NOT** growing and making you sick. At this stage, you cannot infect other people.
  3. **You have active TB disease.**  
You have active growing TB germs in your body and they may make you feel sick. If you have TB disease, you can infect others with your TB germs.

## Is there a treatment for TB?

- TB *can* be cured with free medications. If you develop TB, you **must** have treatment to cure you *and* to prevent you from spreading TB to your family and friends.
- Treatment consists of regularly taking several types of pills for six to nine months. During this time, you will have several chest x-rays and sputum (spit) samples to check your progress.

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting a TB test because there is an extremely rare possibility of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This may include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. **If this happens after you leave the clinic, call 911 or the local emergency number.** This reaction can be treated, and occurs in less than one in one million people who get a TB test.

## Who should you report reactions to?

- Report any adverse or unexpected reactions to your local public health nurse, your doctor, or nurse practitioner as soon as possible.

### Talk to a public health nurse:

- If you have questions or concerns about you or your child's reaction to an immunization.
- If you or your child had to go to a doctor, a hospital or to a health centre with a symptom that might be related to immunization.

## What does the TB test solution contain?

**TUBERSOL®** contains purified protein derivative of *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, phenol, polysorbate 80.

## Mature Minor Consent

It is recommended that parents/guardians discuss consent for immunization with their children. Efforts are first made to get parental/guardian consent for immunizations. However, children at least 13 years of age up to and including 17 years of age, who are able to understand the benefits and possible reactions for each vaccine and the risks of not getting immunized, can legally consent to or refuse immunizations in Saskatchewan by providing mature minor informed consent to a healthcare provider.

Provincial immunization fact sheets are available at [www.saskatchewan.ca/immunize](http://www.saskatchewan.ca/immunize).

Reference: TUBERSOL® Product Monograph (2022).