

Tuberculosis

WHAT IF I HAD A BCG VACCINATION?

Many countries outside the U.S. use Bacille Calmette-Guerin (BCG) vaccination as part of their TB control program, especially for infants. The effectiveness of BCG vaccine varies and protection from active TB disease greatly diminishes over time.

BCG can cause a false-positive reaction when using TB skin tests. TB blood tests are not affected by BCG vaccination and do not give a false-positive test result. If you have received BCG (either as a vaccine or for cancer therapy), the blood test is preferred.



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Learn the facts about

Tuberculosis (TB)



Tuberculosis (TB) is not just a disease of the past. Globally, TB still kills more than 1 million individuals each year. Left untreated, 1 out of 2 persons with active TB disease will die.

WHAT IS TB?

TB is a disease caused by bacteria (germs) which are spread from person to person through the air. TB usually affects the lungs (pulmonary TB) but it can also affect other parts of the body, such as the brain, lymph nodes or spine.

HOW IS TB SPREAD?

TB germs are spread when a person with active TB disease coughs, sneezes, speaks or sings. People who breathe in the air containing TB germs can become infected. Not everyone infected with TB bacteria becomes sick. As a result, two TB-related conditions exist: inactive TB or latent TB infection (LTBI) and active TB disease.

What is the difference between inactive TB and active TB disease?

INACTIVE TB

People with inactive TB have TB germs in their bodies but are not sick because the germs are not active. People with inactive TB who are not treated are at risk for progressing to active TB disease. Treatment for inactive TB is strongly recommended so the TB germs will not become active and cause active TB disease.

ACTIVE TB DISEASE

People with active TB disease are sick from TB germs that are active in their body. The symptoms of pulmonary active TB disease may include: a cough for more than three weeks, unexplained weight loss, fever, night sweats and fatigue. People with active TB

disease can spread TB germs to others. Active TB disease is curable with effective treatment. Left untreated, people with active TB disease can become very sick and die.

How do you test for TB?

SKIN TEST

A TB skin test is the most common type of TB test. It is done by injecting a small amount of fluid (tuberculin) under the skin on your arm. Your healthcare provider will check your arm 48-72 hours after the TB skin test to determine if the test result is “positive” or “negative.”

BLOOD TESTS

Another way to test for TB is by using a special blood test. A blood test measures how your immune system reacts to the germs that cause TB. Your healthcare provider will draw blood from your arm for this test. Only one visit is required, and results are usually available in a few days.

Inactive TB	Active TB Disease (Pulmonary)
Positive TB test (skin or blood test)	The TB test (skin or blood) is usually positive but may be negative or indeterminate
Normal chest X-ray	Abnormal chest X-ray
No symptoms	Symptoms: cough for more than 3 weeks, unexplained weight loss, fever, night sweats and fatigue
Not contagious	May be contagious
Needs treatment for inactive TB to prevent active TB disease	Curable using antibiotics



WHAT IF THE TB TEST IS POSITIVE?

If either the skin or blood test is positive, you are likely infected with TB germs. Your healthcare provider will order a chest X-ray to be sure the TB infection has not progressed to active TB disease. If you are coughing, or the chest X-ray is abnormal, additional testing may be necessary.

IF MY TB TEST IS POSITIVE, SHOULD I TAKE MEDICINE?

Yes, treatment is almost always recommended for people who have a positive TB test. Preferred treatment regimens for inactive TB typically involve taking an antibiotic for 3-4 months. By taking antibiotics to treat inactive TB, you can reduce your risk of having active TB disease by 70-90% over your lifetime. It is important to take all the antibiotics to prevent progression of inactive TB to active TB disease.

Active TB disease can be treated by taking several antibiotics for 6-12 months. It is very important that people with active TB disease finish their antibiotics and take them exactly as prescribed. If people stop taking antibiotics too soon, they can become sick again. If they do not take the antibiotics correctly, the germs that are still alive may become resistant to the antibiotics. The Iowa HHS, TB Control Program provides TB medications to treat inactive TB and active TB disease free of charge.