

Tuberculin Skin Test (TST)

What is tuberculosis (TB)?

- Tuberculosis (TB) is caused by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* bacteria.
- TB usually attacks the lungs, but it can attack any part of the body such as the kidney, spine, and brain.
- Not everyone who has TB bacteria in their body becomes sick.
- People who are sick and have TB in their lungs may spread the bacteria to other people when they cough, sneeze or have close contact with other people for long periods of time.

Why do I need a tuberculin skin test (TST)?

- A tuberculin skin test (TST) tells your health team if you have TB infection.
- You can have TB bacteria in your body, even if you don't feel sick.
- A TST is not a vaccine and it does not protect you against TB.

What is TB infection?

- You have TB bacteria in your body but they are **NOT** growing and making you sick.
- People with TB infection do not feel sick and cannot spread TB bacteria to others.
- People with TB infection may become sick with TB disease in the future.

What is TB disease?

- It is when the TB bacteria in your body become active, grow, and make you sick.
- Symptoms include:
 - Fever and chills
 - A cough lasting 2-3 weeks or longer, or coughing up blood
 - Night sweats
 - Weight loss
 - Poor appetite
 - Tiredness

Who should not get a TST?

- Those who had a positive TST in the past.
- Those who have had an allergic reaction to any ingredients in the TST solution.
- Those who have had a severe reaction (e.g., necrosis, blistering, anaphylactic shock or ulcerations) to a previous TST.
- Those with documented active TB or a history of treatment for TB infection or disease.
- Those with extensive burns or eczema because of a greater likelihood of adverse or severe reactions.
- Those who received a live vaccine should wait 4 weeks before getting a TST done.
- NOTE: Previous BCG vaccination is not a contraindication to having a TST.

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.
- Some people may be tested at a TB Prevention and Control Saskatchewan clinic in Saskatoon, Regina or Prince Albert.

Why are 2 visits needed for a TST?

1. At the first visit, a small amount of TB test solution is injected into the skin on your forearm with a small needle. You will get a temporary raised area (a 'bleb') where the needle was given. This is normal. The bleb will go away 15 minutes after the test. If this area gets itchy, do **not** scratch it and do not put an adhesive bandage over the test site.
2. The second visit happens two or three days later. Your reaction to the TB test is measured with a special ruler to see if your test is negative or positive.

After every TST:

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting a TST 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. This reaction can be treated, and occurs in less than one in one million people who get a TST. **If this happens after you leave the clinic, get medical attention or call 911 right away.**

What do the results mean?

- **If your TST result is negative**, you probably do not have TB bacteria in your body.
- **If your TST result is positive**, you need a chest x-ray to see if you have active TB disease. If your x-ray is not normal or you have TB symptoms, you will be asked to give a sputum sample coughed up from the lungs (not saliva) to test it for TB bacteria. You may need to see the TB doctor.

Can TB be treated?

- **If you develop TB disease, you need treatment to be cured *and* to prevent you from spreading TB bacteria to your family and friends.**
- **TB disease can be cured.** Medicine is given for 6 to 9 months. The medicine is free. You will be followed by the TB doctor and nurse at TB Prevention and Control Saskatchewan.
- **If you have TB infection**, you may be given treatment to prevent you from developing TB disease. Medicine is free. You will be followed by the TB doctor and nurse at TB Prevention and Control Saskatchewan.

For more information contact TB Prevention and Control Saskatchewan, your local public health office, your physician, nurse practitioner, HealthLine online or by calling 811.

Who should you report reactions to?

Report any adverse or unexpected reactions to your local public health nurse, your doctor, nurse practitioner or call 811 as soon as possible.

What does the TB test solution contain?

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

Mature Minor Consent

It is recommended that parents/guardians discuss consent for TST with their children. Efforts are first made to get parental/guardian consent for testing. However, children at least 13 years of age up to and including 17 years of age, who are able to understand the possible reactions for the TST can legally consent to or refuse it in Saskatchewan by providing mature minor informed consent to a healthcare provider.

Provincial fact sheets are available at www.saskatchewan.ca/immunize.

Reference: TUBERSOL® Product Monograph (2022).