

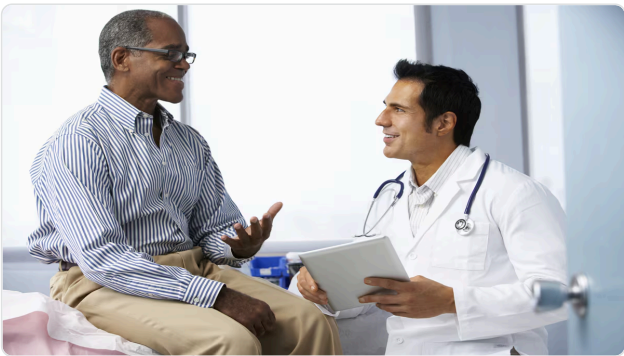


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# Testing for Tuberculosis

KEY POINTS

- There are two types of tests for tuberculosis (TB) infection: the TB blood test and the TB skin test.
- A positive test result for TB infection means you have TB germs in your body.
- If you test positive for TB infection, your health care provider will do other tests to determine if you have inactive TB (also called latent TB infection) or active TB disease.



## Why get tested

Getting tested and treated for [TB](#) can protect yourself, your family and friends, and your community.

You may need a TB test if you have:

- [Symptoms](#) of TB disease
- [Spent time](#) with someone who has active TB disease
- [Factors](#) that put you at higher risk of developing active TB disease
- Employment, school, travel, or immigration health screening requirements

You may need a TB test even if you do not feel sick. TB germs can live in your body for years without making you feel sick. This is called [inactive TB](#). People with inactive TB do not feel sick and cannot spread TB germs to others.

Keep Reading:  
[Treating Tuberculosis](#)

## Who should be tested

If you are at higher risk of being infected with TB germs, you should get tested.

You have a **higher risk of being [exposed](#)** to TB germs if you:

- Were [born in or frequently travel to countries where TB is common](#), including some countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America
- Live or used to live in large group settings where TB is more common, such as [homeless shelters](#), [prisons](#), or [jails](#)
- Recently spent time with someone who has [active TB disease](#)
- Work in places where TB is more likely to spread, such as [hospitals](#), homeless shelters, correctional facilities, and nursing homes

Some people who have inactive TB never develop TB disease, and others with inactive TB develop active TB disease months or even years later when their immune system can no longer keep the TB germs from multiplying and growing in the body.

Anyone can get TB, but some people who have inactive TB are more likely to develop TB disease than others.

You have a **higher risk of developing** TB disease once infected if you:

- Have a weaker immune system because of certain medications or health conditions such as [diabetes](#), cancer, or [HIV](#)
- Became infected with TB germs in the last two years

- Are a baby or young child, especially under five years of age
- Inject illegal drugs
- Are sick with other diseases that weaken the immune system
- Are elderly
- Were not treated correctly for TB in the past

TB tests are generally not needed for people with a low risk of infection with TB germs.

**Keep Reading:**  
[Tuberculosis Risk Factors](#)

## Types of tests

There are two types of [tests](#) for TB infection: the [TB blood test](#) and the [TB skin test](#). Ask your health care provider which TB test is best for you.


### TB blood test

[TB blood tests](#) (also called interferon-gamma release assays or IGRAs) use a blood sample to find out if you are infected with TB germs. The tests measure how your immune system reacts when a small amount of your blood is mixed with TB proteins.

**Tell your health care provider if you received a TB vaccine**

Many people born outside the United States have received the TB vaccine (also known as [Bacille Calmette-Guérin or BCG](#)).

TB blood tests are the preferred test for people who have received the TB vaccine. Unlike the TB skin test, TB blood tests are not affected by BCG vaccination.



**Keep Reading:**  
[Testing for Tuberculosis: Blood Test](#)

### TB skin test

For the [TB skin test](#), a health care provider uses a small needle to put some testing material under the skin. You will need to return to your health care provider in two to three days to see if there is a reaction.

**Keep Reading:**  
[Testing for Tuberculosis: Skin Test](#)

## Other tests may be needed

Your health care provider will do [other tests](#) to determine if you have inactive TB or active TB disease if you have a:

- Positive TB blood test or TB skin test result
- Negative TB blood test or TB skin test result, but you have [symptoms](#) of active TB disease

These tests may include a chest x-ray, and a test of the sputum (phlegm) you cough up.

**Keep Reading:**  
[Diagnosing Tuberculosis](#)

## How to get tested

You can get tested for TB at the health department or at your health care provider's office. Your health care provider will choose the TB test that is best for you. Public and private health care plans may cover TB testing costs.

**Finding a test location**

Contact your state or local TB program about getting tested for TB.

[State TB Programs](#)

# Understanding TB blood test or TB skin test results

A **positive test result for TB infection** means you have TB germs in your body. Your health care provider will do other [tests](#) to determine if you have inactive TB or active TB disease. These tests may include a chest x-ray, and a test of the sputum (phlegm) you cough up.

A **negative test result for TB infection** means inactive TB or active TB disease is unlikely, but your health care provider may do more tests, especially if:

- You have [symptoms](#) of active TB disease, like coughing, chest pain, fever, weight loss, or tiredness.
- You have [HIV](#).
- You were recently [exposed](#) to TB germs.

**Keep Reading:**  
[Diagnosing Tuberculosis](#)

# What to do if you've tested positive

If your TB blood test or TB skin test is positive, you have TB germs in your body. Your health care provider will do other [tests](#) to determine if you have inactive TB or active TB disease.

**Keep a record of your positive test result**



Once you have a positive TB blood test or TB skin test result, you may still have a positive test result on future TB tests. This includes even after you finish taking all of your TB medicine for inactive TB or active TB disease.

Ask your health care provider for a written record of your positive TB test result. This will be helpful if you are asked to have another TB test in the future.

**Keep Reading:**  
[Diagnosing Tuberculosis](#)

# Resources

[What You Need to Know About Tuberculosis Fact Sheet](#)

[Questions and Answers About Tuberculosis Booklet](#)

[What You Need to Know About the TB Skin Test Fact Sheet](#)

SOURCES

**CONTENT SOURCE:**  
[Division of Tuberculosis Elimination](#) ; [National Center for HIV, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and Tuberculosis Prevention](#); [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)