



National Institute for Public Health  
and the Environment  
*Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport*

# Skin test and blood test **TB**



## Why is screening necessary?

Tuberculosis (TB) is a serious disease caused by bacteria. The disease occurs worldwide. Even if you are not ill, you could still be infected by TB bacteria. This is called a TB infection. Treating a TB infection can prevent TB at a later stage.

## Who is invited to be screened?

The letter inviting you to take part in the screening programme explains why you (or your child) have been asked to be screened.

Possible reasons include:

- You (or your child) come from a country with high rates of TB.
- You (or your child) are in or have had contact with someone suffering from TB or who is infected with the TB bacteria.
- You suffer from reduced immunity, for example due to HIV or medication that weakens the immune system. People with a reduced immunity who already have TB bacteria in their body (TB infection) are at a higher risk of developing TB.
- You work with groups of people from areas with high rates of TB.
- You travel to countries with high rates of TB.

## How do we screen for TB infection?

You will be asked to fill in a questionnaire about your general health beforehand. A skin test and/or a blood test will then be taken. These tests can show whether your body recognises TB bacteria and whether you may be infected. If necessary, we will take a chest X-ray to be absolutely sure that you do not have TB.

The questionnaire will tell us whether:

- you have any symptoms that could be caused by TB;
- you have an increased risk of developing TB. This is important to assess the test results correctly.

The skin test is safe, also for children and pregnant women.

# The tuberculin skin test (TST)

## From test to result

### 1 The skin test

For the skin test, we inject a small amount of fluid into the skin on the outside of the left forearm. You will gradually see a small bump develop. This is normal. The bump should disappear after a few minutes, sometimes a little longer.



After the skin test, you will make an appointment to return to the Municipal Public Health Service (GGD). We will then see whether your body has reacted to the test. This will be after two to three days.

### 2 Wait for the assessment

It will be two to three days before a possible reaction can be measured.



It is important that you do not rub or scratch the site of the injection. You must also not apply a plaster to it.

### 3 The result

Go to your appointment at the GGD for the result. An employee will feel whether your skin has reacted. If there is a reaction to the skin test, a blood test will usually be taken.



The appointment with the GGD is after two to three days. After that, any reaction can no longer be assessed and the test would have to be repeated, so it is important that you come to the GGD at the agreed time.

If the result of the skin test is positive, a chest X-ray will be taken. This is to rule out TB.

## What could the result be?

You can receive one of the following two results:

### **The skin test (TST) is negative**

No reaction was measured. At this time, there is no evidence of a TB infection.

### **The skin test (TST) is positive**

A reaction was measured. This means that you may be infected by TB bacteria.

### **If the skin test is positive, this can mean four things:**

1. You are infected with TB bacteria, but are not or not yet ill with the disease.
2. You have TB.
3. You have been infected by bacteria that are very similar to TB bacteria.
4. You have had a vaccination against TB (BCG vaccination).

Further testing is necessary to identify the precise cause. A blood test can show us if you are actually infected with the bacteria. That is why a blood test is usually taken if the result of the skin test is positive. Children aged five or younger and people with a weaker immune system will not always need to have a blood test.

The doctor will discuss with you what should be done.

## The blood test (IGRA)

### From test to result

#### 1 The blood test

A blood sample must be taken to test for TB.

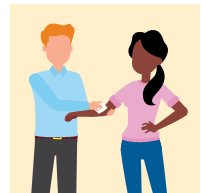
A. An employee will put an elastic band round your arm.



B. The employee will now take a few tubes of blood.

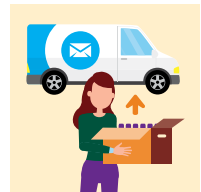


C. The employee will then apply a cotton-wool pad/gauze to the skin.

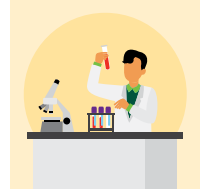


#### 2 The laboratory analysis

Your blood will be sent to the laboratory.

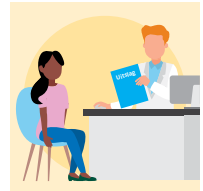


The lab will test the blood for a possible TB infection.



### 3 The result

You will usually get the result two to three weeks after the blood test.



## What could the result be?

You can receive one of the following two results:

### **The blood test (IGRA) is negative**

No antibodies against TB bacteria were found in your blood. This means that you are not infected with TB bacteria.

### **The blood test (IGRA) is positive**

Antibodies against TB bacteria were found in your blood.

If the blood test is positive, this could mean two things:

- You are infected with TB bacteria, but you are not (yet) ill with the disease.
- You (may) have TB.

## What happens if the screening/test result is positive?

Further testing may be necessary. The doctor will discuss with you what should be done.

## What do we do with your data?

The GGD follows the rules of the law in handling your personal data that are stored in your medical file.

## Any questions, tips, complaints or compliments about the screening?

- Please contact the TB prevention department of the GGD in your region. You can find the contact details on [www.ggd.nl](http://www.ggd.nl) and in the vaccination invitation. GGDs have a complaints procedure.
- For more information about TB, go to [www.rivm.nl/tuberculose](http://www.rivm.nl/tuberculose).

This information is available in English at:

Xogtaan oo Soomaali ah waxaa laga heli karaa:

Te informacje można znaleźć w języku polskim na stronie:

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هذه المعلومات متاحة باللغة العربية في هذا الموضوع:

این معلومات به زبان دری در اینجا قابل دسترسی است:



[www.rivm.nl/en/tuberculosis/information-materials](http://www.rivm.nl/en/tuberculosis/information-materials)

Photo on the front: KNCV Tuberculosis Foundation

Published by:

**National Institute for Public Health  
and the Environment, RIVM**

PO Box 1 | 3720 BA Bilthoven

The Netherlands

[www.rivm.nl/en](http://www.rivm.nl/en)

September 2022

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