

Tuberculosis and Tuberculin (Mantoux) Skin Test

What is tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by bacteria *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. 10 percent of people infected with TB will develop active TB disease.

TB is the leading cause of death from infectious disease in the world.

Where is TB found?

TB is found around the world.

How is TB spread?

TB is spread from person-to-person by droplets from the nose and mouth (example: coughing, sneezing). You can then breathe the bacteria into your lungs. It is not spread by casual contact.

What are the symptoms of TB?

Symptoms of active TB include:

- chronic cough lasting longer than 3 weeks
- night sweats
- weight loss
- coughing up blood
- poor appetite
- fever
- feeling tired
- chills

How is tuberculosis treated?

Antibiotics can cure TB. Treatment must be taken for at least 6 months.

How is tuberculosis prevented?

The risk for most travelers is low. Long-term travellers (longer than 6 months) visiting a country with high rates of TB are at higher risk, especially those living with, or working closely with local people.

People who work in healthcare, relief, or mission work are at highest risk. These travellers should:

- have a baseline Mantoux test before high-risk travel
- repeat the Mantoux test 2–3 months after return from travel

The Tuberculin (Mantoux) Skin Test

A Mantoux test is given to see if you have TB in your body. A small amount of a non-infectious TB protein is injected under the skin on the forearm. In 48 to 72 hours, your arm will be checked to see if there is a reaction. If there is no change, you have a negative result. If the area is swollen or red, you have a positive result.

A negative Mantoux test means that you are not infected with TB. A positive Mantoux test usually means that you have TB infection. Many people who have TB infection never develop active TB disease. A positive Mantoux test can also mean that you have received TB vaccine (BCG) or have been infected with a disease similar to TB. You will need to see your family doctor or Tuberculosis Services and get a chest x-ray and possibly other tests.

For the test to be valid, you **must return** to the clinic to have your arm looked at and the results documented.

Sides Effects from the Skin Test

Most people have no side effects from the Mantoux test. There may be some itchiness and soreness on the arm where the injection is given. Putting an ice pack on the area can help.

If you have questions about travel vaccines, call the International Travel Clinic at 403-955-6777 or the Rural Public Health Office Travel Clinic. If you think you are having a vaccine reaction, call Health Link Alberta at 403-943-LINK (5465) or 1-866-408-LINK (5465) toll-free. If you think it is life-threatening, call 911.

References:

1. Public Health Agency of Canada. 1996. *CATMAT-Tuberculosis Screening and the International Traveller, CATMAT, CCCR, Vol 22-18*. Retrieved May 28, 2009: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/ccdr-rmtc/96vol22/dr2218ea.html
2. World Health Organization. 2007. *International Travel and Health*. World Health Organization Publications Office, Geneva: SD.
3. Health Canada (March 2009). *Tuberculosis*. www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/diseases-maladies/tubercu-eng.php Retrieved April 8, 2009.

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