TB (Tuberculosis) Tine Test

The tuberculin tine test is used to determine whether someone has come in contact with the bacteria that cause a disease called tuberculosis.

HOW THE TEST IS DONE

This test uses a tiny spiked instrument to inject a small amount of the tuberculosis dead protein material (*antigen*) just under your skin. This is most commonly done on the arm. Usually, the area is marked with an ink pen. That way it can be checked for any redness and swelling. It is usually checked in 2 to 3 days.

Note: Another test, called the “tuberculin skin test” (also called a PPD), is more accurate than the TB tine test. It is the preferred method of determining exposure to tuberculosis.

PREPARATION FOR THE TEST

There is no special preparation. People with a skin rash or other skin irritations on their arms may need to have the test performed at a different spot on the body.

HOW THE TEST WILL FEEL

Some people feel a slight stinging sensation when the instrument is inserted under the skin. After the test, the area may itch or burn.

MEANING OF THE TEST

This test helps determine if you have ever been exposed to a disease called tuberculosis. If so, your immune system produced antibodies to help fight the disease. These remain in your body. When this test is performed, those with antibodies to tuberculosis will have a positive test result.

OBTAINING TEST RESULTS

The area needs to be checked for any redness and swelling at a later time, usually in 2 to 3 days. Follow your caregiver's instructions as to where and when to report for this to be done.

NORMAL RESULTS

If you have a negative test result, the area may be a little red, but will not be swollen and firm like a mosquito bite. This means you have not been exposed to the bacteria that cause tuberculosis.

WHAT ABNORMAL RESULTS MEAN

If you have been exposed to tuberculosis, the area will become red and swell like a mosquito bit in 48 to 72 hours. This is considered a positive test result. It means your body's immune system detected the substance injected under your skin. A positive TB tine test does not mean that you have active tuberculosis. It only means that you have been exposed at some point in the past.
A chest x-ray may be taken to evaluate whether you have active tuberculosis.
Once you have been exposed, all future TB tine tests will be positive. If you have a positive TB tine test, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that you have a TB skin test (PPD, see above), unless the first tine test had a blistering or very large reaction.

RISKS

The risk of severe side effects is very low. In the unlikely event that a side effect occurs, typical ones include itching and hives. Rarely, the area may blister, or the area of swelling may become very large.
Tell your health care provider if you have any severe reactions.

CONSIDERATIONS

The test results may be incorrect (false negative). False negative means the test suggests you have not been exposed to tuberculosis, but you really have been.
This is more likely in the elderly and in patients with weakened immune systems, such as:

- AIDS patients
- Cancer patients who receive chemotherapy
- Those who receive organ transplants
- Anyone taking high doses of prescription steroid medication

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