

No Shame in TB Screening

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease of the lungs that is not as common as it used to be. In the Northern St'at'imc communities there has not been an active TB case for at least 15 years! However, the disease still exists and although not contagious, latent TB is still around and it is important to know if you have it (Please see attached BCCDC info sheet to learn more about latent TB). You can be screened for TB using a TB skin test.

How can I be tested for TB?

Visit your health care provider for a check-up if you have symptoms of TB disease or want to know if you have latent TB infection. Your health care provider will do a TB assessment and order the appropriate tests.

A tuberculin skin test or TB skin test is used to test for TB infection. It tells your health care provider if your body has "seen" the TB bacteria before. It does not tell whether the TB bacteria are latent or active.

The TB skin test is a two-part test.

First appointment: A tiny needle is used to inject a small amount of a test substance called Tubersol[®] under the first layer of skin on your forearm. It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after the test because there is an extremely rare possibility of having a life-threatening allergic reaction, called anaphylaxis, to the Tubersol[®].

Second appointment: You must go back to the clinic 48 to 72 hours later to have the test read by a trained health care provider. People who have been infected with TB usually respond with a raised, firm reaction at the site where the Tubersol[®] was injected.

<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/health-topics/hw207301>

A positive TB skin test **does not** mean you have TB. It is nothing to be ashamed about and can mean 4 different things:

1. You had the TB vaccine (BCG) as a child and it is causing a false positive.
2. You have a false positive for another reason.
3. You have latent TB.
4. You have active TB.

A positive TB skin test also means you need further investigation:

Chest X-ray: a TB doctor will look at your x-ray to see if there is any evidence of TB in your lungs.

and/or

IGRA blood test: IGRA stands for, interferon gamma release assay and is a blood test that is used to test for TB in the body.

Every year community TB screening is offered in your community usually in March and April and is recommended yearly for:

- Health center staff
- Daycare and preschool staff
- Individuals from high risk groups:
 - Diabetes
 - HIV/AIDS
 - Cancer
 - Lymphoma
 - Leukemia
 - Kidney dialysis
 - Organ transplants
 - Low body weight

Others that do not fit into the list above are welcome to community TB screening. Also TB screening is offered all through the year you just need to set up an appointment with your community health nurse. Call your community health office to get in touch with your nurse.



Natasha Hatendi works with The First Nations Health Authority and is a community health nurse in the Lillooet area.