

LOS ANGELES COUNTY – DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAMS – TB CONTROL PROGRAM

UPDATE ON TUBERCULOSIS SKIN TEST (TST)

In 1985, Tuberculosis Skin Test School Mandate Reporting began in Los Angeles County and has continued to date. The purpose of the school mandate is to measure annual tuberculosis (TB) infection rates in the school-aged population and to identify children who are candidates for treatment of latent TB infection (LTBI).

To assist the reader, this article will respond to the most frequently asked questions regarding TB skin test (TST) for school students:

GENERAL QUESTIONS	ANSWERS
What does a positive TB skin test (TST) result mean?	A positive TB skin test (TST) means that a person has been exposed to TB germs (bacteria) at sometime during his/her life. It does <u>not</u> indicate that a person has TB disease or is contagious.
When should a TB skin test (TST) be examined (read or checked)?	The tuberculin skin test (TST) should be examined (or read) 48 to 72 hours after it is administered. It is <u>acceptable</u> to read the Mantoux skin test up to 96 hours after administration if it is not possible to do so earlier. After 96 hours, a skin test reading of less than 10 mm of induration should be repeated. A skin test reading of 10 mm or more is positive at any time.
Should a person who had a BCG vaccination get a TB skin test?	Yes. Not all BCG vaccinations are effective. A history of BCG vaccination does not exempt students or school employees from the skin test.
What is TB infection?	A person with a positive skin test and normal (negative) chest X-ray has TB infection. This means that the person's immune system has been able to fight the TB bacteria to prevent them from growing. TB infection is NOT contagious.
When is TB contagious?	TB can be contagious in adolescents and adults who are coughing, have a positive skin test, and an abnormal (positive) chest X-ray. TB medications will make the person non-contagious very quickly. Because of the efficiency of TB medicines, patients are not quarantined and are usually able to return to school or work within several weeks.
Are children with active TB contagious?	Children under the age of 12 rarely have contagious TB. This is because they have TB in a different area in the lung and do not aerosolize or cough up their germs into the air. It is for this reason that the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services has been instructed to check the immunization record on these children as being "free of communicable TB" on the day that the chest X-ray is taken.
If a student or staff member is found to have active TB, what does the County Health Department do?	Not all TB is contagious. If the County Health Department determines that the student or staff member is contagious, he/she will not be allowed to remain in school, and the persons sharing the air space with this person will be tested for TB. The student or staff member will not be allowed back to school until he/she is no longer contagious.
I read about this new strain of TB where the drugs do not work. Am I in danger of getting this?	There really is not a new strain. There have always been people with TB in which some of the medicines do not work. If this is the case, we use additional medicines and give them for a longer period of time. Cases where medicines are not completely effective are uncommon in Los Angeles County.
QUESTIONS REGARDING CHILDREN	ANSWERS
In Los Angeles County, what students must have a TB test?	At enrollment, all kindergarten entrants and all students in grades 1-12 who never previously attended a California school. They must

	provide written documentation of a TB skin test (TST) using the Mantoux technique. Kindergarten entrants must have had this test within the year prior to the first day of school.
My child attended school in California and left the country for several years. Does he/she need a TB skin test (TST) when he/she returns?	No. Students who previously attended a California school are exempt from the requirement, even if they have never had a skin test.
My child is transferring from another school within California. Does he need a skin test when he returns?	No. Students entering at any grade level from any other California school (public, private, or parochial) are exempt from the requirement even if they never received a skin test.
May my child attend school with a new positive skin test?	Yes. A student may enter school after the skin test is read by the school nurse or the family's health care provider in the community. A student can be conditionally admitted for up to 20 school days until a negative chest X-ray result or a notation from the family's health care provider is received stating that the student is "free of communicable TB". If the school does not receive the documentation, the child may be excluded from school.
In the past, my child had a positive skin test and/or took medication for TB prescribed by our doctor. What do I need to bring to school to allow him/her to be enrolled?	A child with a previous positive skin test must bring documentation from a health care provider of previous results of skin test, chest X-ray, treatment if any, and a current statement from a health care provider that he/she is "free of communicable TB".
It is against my personal beliefs for my child to have a TB skin test. May my child still enter school?	Yes. Personal belief exemptions are allowed. The parent may sign the personal belief statement on the back of the California School Immunization Record (CSIR) card.
QUESTIONS REGARDING EMPLOYEES/VOLUNTEERS	ANSWERS
What type of TB skin test (TST) must school employees undergo?	The Mantoux Tuberculin Skin Test is the only acceptable method of TB skin test (TST) for school employees.*
Which school volunteers need a TB test?	Volunteers who have <u>repeated</u> contact with students in the classroom setting must meet the same criteria for TB testing as school staff members. Exception: Volunteers who come in to assist with <u>one time</u> activities, such as: clerical functions, supervising field trips or dances, do not have sufficient contact with students or staff to constitute a risk.
How often does a TB skin test (TST) have to be repeated?	If you have a negative skin test, you need a repeat test at least once every four years. If you have a documented positive skin test, you must have an initial chest X-ray. After that, you still need to be screened every four years. You must present, either a certificate from a health care provider stating that you are "free from communicable TB", or have your chest X-ray repeated.
Why are not people who work with children (teachers, school aides, etc.) required to have TB screening more often?	Minimum state regulations require TB screening once every 4 years. School staff members may request TB testing more frequently from their health care provider, but school districts are not required to provide it more than once every 4 years.
I had a positive TB skin test (TST) many years ago, but I can't find my records. Why can't I just get a chest X-ray?	If you <u>cannot document</u> in writing a previous positive skin test (from your own records or your physician), you will have to get another skin test. Only the Mantoux skin test will demonstrate TB infection.

Remember:

- People who have a positive TB skin test with a normal chest X-ray are **NOT** contagious, but may need medicine to prevent them from ever getting active TB disease.
- Children under the age of 12 with active TB disease are rarely contagious, and they do not need to be kept out of school.

If you have any questions please contact: "Nurse- on- Phones", at the Tuberculosis Control Program, Department of Public Health, Los Angeles County, (213) 744-6160.

***Note: Interferon-Gamma Release Assays (IGRAs) are also approved by the FDA as TB screening tests. Please see "Interferon-Gamma Release Assays (IGRAs) for Tuberculosis infection: Questions and Answers".**