

INFORMATION ABOUT THE TUBERCULIN SKIN TEST AND IGRA

WHY A TUBERCULOSIS INFECTION TEST?

Tuberculosis is a serious disease. The disease can be prevented with medication. If you have contracted the disease, it can be treated easily in general. So it is important that you know whether you have contracted the disease. The tuberculin skin test and the Interferon Gamma Release Assay (IGRA) can be used to demonstrate an infection with the tuberculosis bacteria.

WHEN IS THIS TEST PERFORMED?

The test is performed in persons:

- who have been in contact with a TB patient or with someone who has been infected with the tuberculosis bacteria.
- who have a disease or who take or will take medication that suppresses the body's immune system. The tuberculosis disease may develop more quickly in persons who are infected.
- who work with persons who run an increased risk of having tuberculosis.
- who travel to countries where the tuberculosis disease is prevalent.

TUBERCULIN SKIN TEST OR IGRA?

The tuberculin skin test is performed first. If there is a reaction to the tuberculin skin test, an IGRA (blood test) is often performed after that. A skin reaction can also occur if you have been in contact with bacteria that closely resemble the tuberculosis bacteria. Vaccination against tuberculosis (BCG vaccination) can also give a skin reaction. In that case, an IGRA may provide clarity. For the IGRA closely measures the immune response to the tuberculosis bacteria and not to these other bacteria or the vaccination.



HOW DOES THE TUBERCULIN SKIN TEST WORK?

A small amount of liquid (tuberculin) is injected into the skin. This is done on the outer side of the left lower arm. After two to three days (so after 48 to 72 hours), the GGD staff member can assess the skin reaction. A skin reaction could mean that you are infected with the tuberculosis bacteria. This test is not dangerous, not even for children or pregnant women. Tuberculin that is used at present has not been registered in the Netherlands, but in another European country. The Minister of Health has given permission to use this Tuberculin in the Netherlands.

What does a negative skin reaction mean?

The skin shows no thickening. The tuberculin skin test is negative. This means that this test has not demonstrated any infection at present.

What does a positive skin reaction mean?

The skin shows a thickening. Not every thickening of the skin means that you are infected with the tuberculosis bacteria. A blood test may be necessary in order to be certain. Moreover, a lung X-ray will be taken in case of a positive skin reaction. This is necessary in order to rule out the tuberculosis disease.

HOW DOES THE IGRA WORK?

A blood sample is taken for the IGRA. The blood is examined in the laboratory. After the blood sample has been taken, you can continue with your daily routine. This blood test does not involve any risks.

What does a negative result mean?

No immune response to the tuberculosis bacteria is measured in the blood.

What does a positive result mean?

An immune response to the tuberculosis bacteria is measured in the blood.

There are two options:

1. You have been infected with the tuberculosis bacteria, but you are not ill (yet).
2. You may have contracted the tuberculosis disease. Further testing may be necessary. The doctor will discuss the next step with you.

WHEN WILL THE TEST RESULTS BE AVAILABLE?

The GGD staff member will tell you when and how you will be informed of the results.

DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS?

Please contact your doctor or the tuberculosis control department of the GGD.

More information about tuberculosis can be found on the website www.tuberculose.nl. Do you believe that you were treated wrongly? The GGD offers the opportunity to file a complaint. More information about this can be found on the GGD website.