

INFORMATION ON TUBERCULOSIS TESTING

There are many different ways TB can cause infection, but generally speaking, there is active and latent (sleeping) TB. **Active** pulmonary TB usually is accompanied by fever, chills, weight loss, fatigue, prolonged cough with blood in the sputum, and/or an abnormal chest X-ray. It is unlikely that you have active pulmonary TB if you do not have any of the symptoms mentioned above. It is very difficult to treat active TB, and often one must take 4-6 medications for many months, to do so.

Latent TB, however, does not usually have any symptoms and can be difficult to detect. People often acquire this infection after being around someone with TB (they may not even know the person has TB) and breathing in some TB spores that are in the air around them. We often use the Mantoux skin test (often called the “TB skin test”) to detect this type of infection. If someone has latent TB and it is not treated with 6-9 months isoniazide, there is a chance it could develop into an active infection at some point in the future.

Many countries (but not the USA), administer the BCG vaccination to newborns, in order to decrease the risk of acquiring TB. The BCG vaccination, however, usually makes the Mantoux skin test positive, so it can be difficult to know whether the positive skin test is due to latent TB or the BCG vaccination.

For this reason, we encourage those that know they have had the BCG vaccination and those that don't know whether they had it but were born in a country that usually administers it at birth, to consider having an IGRA blood test done instead of the Mantoux skin test, since it is much more accurate in this setting. The IGRA blood test can be done at the APU Student Health Center or one of our local labs. As of November 2011, the cost for the IGRA blood test is about \$45 (after submitting the fees to your student health insurance for reimbursement), which is about the same as the Mantoux skin test (\$10) and a chest X-Ray (\$35). Anyone with a positive Mantoux skin test, must have a chest X-Ray done.