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Health Department

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Quantiferon: a New Test for Tuberculosis (TB)

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What is QuantiFeron (QFT)?

Quantiferon is a blood test to detect TB germs in your body. Though not 100% accurate, it is more accurate than the skin test. Sometimes other germs in your body which are not TB germs can make your skin test positive, or the skin test can be positive because you were vaccinated with BCG. (BCG is a vaccine given in many countries that may help prevent TB in small children.) People who have had BCG will always react with a positive skin test even if they do not have TB germs. The QFT also works if you have not had a skin test at all.

How does the blood test work ?

A small amount of blood is drawn from your arm with a needle. A lab tests the blood, and the results are ready in a few days.

What do the QuantiFeron test results mean?

When using the QFT, the nurse must always keep in mind the presence of certain risk factors, such as exposure to TB, HIV, and symptoms in order to understand the results. However, in general,

- A **positive** test result usually means you *have* TB germs **in your body**. You will be contact to return to the clinic. You will need a chest x-ray and medical exam to tell whether you have latent TB (you have the germs, but they are walled off and sleeping) or active TB (you have symptoms and you are sick). A nurse will talk with you about your risk of developing active TB and if treatment is right for you. A doctor will review your chest x-ray and recommend a course of treatment.
- A **negative** result usually means you *do not have* TB germs **in your body**. No further follow-up is necessary unless you have symptoms such as coughing for more than 3 weeks, fever, or unplanned weight loss, or if the nurse determines you are at increased risk of active disease. If you had a positive skin test, there is a small but unlikely chance you have TB germs. You may request further evaluation.
- Sometimes the QFT does not work because the germs are too new in your body or your immune system is weak (for example, you have HIV). You may need a chest X-ray and a medical exam. Rarely, the blood test does not work and just needs to be done again. The nurse will let you know if you need to be retested or what other tests or exams are needed.

What are the advantages of having a QFT test?

- **Without the QFT test** - if you have a positive skin test, for your safety and those around you, it is best to assume you have the TB germ. Even with BCG, you could still be infected. This means you will need a chest x-ray and a course of medication to make sure any possible germs are dead.
- **With a positive QFT test**— you will know you have the TB germ and need a chest x-ray and a course of medication. You can take specific action to take care of yourself and be cured.
- **With a negative QuantiFeron test** - you can be sure you do not have TB and that there is no need for more testing or medication.

For more information, visit the Center for Disease Control and Protection Web site: <http://www.cdc.gov/TB/pubs/tbfactsheets/QFT.pdf>.