

# CHENANGO COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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## HEALTH EDUCATION DIVISION

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*For The Health of IT*

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### TUBERCULOSIS AND SKIN TESTING

Tuberculosis is a contagious disease caused by bacteria. It is spread through the air when a person ill with TB coughs, speaks, laughs, sneezes or sings causing others close by to breathe the TB germ into their lungs. Although the lungs are the most common site of infection, TB can also infect other organs like the brain, spine or the kidneys.

When TB germs live in the body without causing illness, it is called latent TB infection. Persons with Latent TB have a small amount of TB bacteria in their body that are alive but dormant. They often have a positive skin test or TB blood test. Their chest x-ray is usually normal. While the person with latent TB infection has no symptoms, feels well and is not contagious, latent TB can become active and therefore contagious. Treatment is recommended with an antibiotic to decrease the chance that the TB germs will activate and the person become contagious.

In contrast a person with TB disease has a larger amount of active bacteria in their body, and may have symptoms such as cough, fever, weight loss, and/ or fatigue. Their skin or blood test may be positive depending on when it is done, and they have an abnormal chest x-ray. Sputum testing is usually done and also positive for TB. This person is contagious and will require treatment with multiple antibiotics.

The CDC recommends that TB testing should be targeted to those individuals for whom rates of TB are much higher than for the general population such as health care workers employed in hospitals, nursing homes, and in correctional facilities, persons with known exposure and those foreign born persons who are from countries with high rates of TB.

There are two types of testing currently in use for TB. One is the TB skin test which has been in use for many years and the second are called IGRAs or TB blood tests. The skin test is done by injecting a small amount of liquid called tuberculin into the skin of the lower arm. A small bump will appear at the site of injection. A second visit is required for a reading of the skin test in 48-72 hours. The nurse will look for a raised area of swelling which should be measured with a ruler in millimeters. Redness alone is not considered part of the reaction. Skin tests are classified depending on size of swelling or induration measures as well as the individual's risk of TB exposure.

There are two types of blood tests (IGRAs) available: 1. is the Quantiferon Gold or QFT and 2. the T-Spot. To perform the IGRA, blood is collected into special tubes using a needle. The specimen is delivered to a lab following strict protocols. The blood test is run and results are reported to the patient's medical doctor. IGRAS measure a person's immune reactivity to Tuberculosis. A positive test tells us the person has been infected with TB germs. A negative test indicates no reaction to the test and that both latent TB and active disease are unlikely. Persons positive either by skin test or blood test should be sent for additional testing to rule out active TB.

You may be wondering who can have a TB skin test versus who may have an IGRA or blood test. Almost everyone can have a TST (skin test): infants, children, pregnant women, those with HIV and those who have had BCG- a TB vaccine given in other countries. However, persons who have had a severe reaction to a previous test should not receive another test. IGRAS can be given in place of a TST. It is preferred that patients be given either the TST or the IGRA but not both with rare exceptions. The IGRA blood test is actually the better test for those who have received the BCG vaccine and those who cannot return for a second visit. It is the provider's decision which test is more suitable for his/her patient. Factors to consider are reason for testing, test availability and cost.

Persons with questions or requiring additional information may contact the  
Chenango County Health Department at **(607) 337-1660**.

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