

TB is a contagious disease which is caused by bacteria that are spread through the air when someone with active, infectious TB disease coughs, sneezes, sings, plays a wind instrument or to a lesser extent, talks.

If you breathe in the TB bacteria, your body's immune system may kill the TB bacteria. If your body's defence system doesn't kill the TB bacteria, they can remain alive but inactive in your body. If this happens, you have what is called latent TB infection. You will not feel sick and you cannot spread TB germs to others.

If you have latent TB infection and your body's defence system becomes weak because you have some other illness, you may develop active TB disease. You will feel sick and may infect other people. TB bacteria usually attack the lungs but it can also affect other parts of your body, such as your lymph nodes. Both latent TB infection and TB disease can be cured with antibiotic drugs.

**Screening for TB:** All McMaster Health Science students are required to have screening for TB before entering their Programs. TB skin testing involves an injection of purified protein derivative (ppd) given under the surface of your skin and returning after 48 to 72 hours to have the test read. A two-step test is two separate tests 7-28 days apart, requiring a total of 4 visits to your health care provider. Detailed instructions are on the Health Screening Record. Upper level students (with the exception of Postgraduate Medicine students) are also required to submit annual screening -- Forms are available on the Forms tab.

**Positive skin test:** A positive TB skin test usually means that you have latent TB infection. A positive test without latent TB infection can happen in people who have been vaccinated with BCG vaccine or who have been infected with other TB-like bacteria. You will require a chest x-ray and a medical assessment and education of the positive result by a physician.

**Negative skin test:** A negative TB skin test usually means you are not infected with TB. But a negative test can also happen if you have only recently been infected. It takes three to eight weeks after exposure to a person with infectious TB disease for the skin test to become positive. A negative test can also happen if your body's defence (immune) system is weak. For example, if you have HIV infection or active TB disease, your skin test may be negative even if TB bacteria are in your body.

**Blood test for diagnosing latent TB infection:** In addition to the skin test, blood tests for latent TB infection are also available (IGRA serology). These tests are not recommended for routine diagnosis of latent TB infection and are only accepted by McMaster for international students who cannot access TB skin testing in their home country.

**TB Conversion:** If you have a previously submitted a record of a negative two-step TB skin test, and have subsequently had a positive TB skin test result  $\geq 10$  mm induration during your program, you are considered to be a converter. This means you have been exposed to tuberculosis. You will need to submit the following form to the FHS Health Screening Office: [TB Conversion Form](#)

For more information see:

[TB FAQ Public Health Agency of Canada](#)

[Latent TB Infection](#)

[Active TB Disease](#)

[Public Health Positive TB Test Report Form](#)