

BCG Vaccine Fact Sheet



WHAT IS THE BCG VACCINE?

The **Bacillus Calmette-Guérin (BCG) vaccine** is given to infants worldwide in areas where **tuberculosis (TB)** is still common. The BCG vaccine is **not** used in the United States.

DOES THE BCG VACCINE PROTECT ME AGAINST GETTING TB?

No, the BCG vaccine does **not offer adults any protection** from TB. The BCG vaccine protects very young children from severe forms of TB such as meningitis.

BCG VACCINE QUICK FACTS

- The BCG vaccine does not protect you from developing tuberculosis.
- A blood test can determine if you have TB bacteria in your body.
- Tell your provider if you have received a BCG vaccine.



HOW DO DOCTORS TEST FOR INFECTION WITH THE TB BACTERIA?

- A skin test can tell if you have TB bacteria in your body, **but** the BCG vaccine may cause a false-positive skin test reaction.
- A blood test (also called an interferon-gamma release assay or IGRA) can also determine if you are infected with TB bacteria. The test will measure how your immune system reacts when a small amount of your blood is mixed with TB proteins. This blood test does **NOT** cause a false-positive reaction due to the BCG vaccination.
- A TB blood test is recommended for people who have received the BCG vaccine as children.



WHY IS MY TB BLOOD TEST POSITIVE?

A positive TB blood test means you have TB bacteria in your body. TB can be active or inactive (often called “latent”).

- Active TB disease is contagious, and you may have symptoms such as cough, fever, unintended weight loss, and sweating at night.
- Inactive, or latent TB infection (LTBI) means that you have TB bacteria in your body, but it is not yet making you sick. LTBI is not contagious and does not cause any symptoms. However, you can still get sick in the future from the TB bacteria becoming active, especially if you have a condition impacting the immune system, including diabetes.



WHY SHOULD I GET TREATED FOR TB EVEN IF I DON'T FEEL SICK?

- Taking medication for LTBI can prevent you from getting sick with TB later. Although you cannot spread inactive or latent TB infection to others, you can become contagious if the TB bacteria become active and make you sick. By finishing your medication, you protect yourself, your family, and everyone around you.