

The blood test for tuberculosis infection

QuantiFERON®-TB Gold



This pamphlet was designed for general educational purposes to help answer your questions about QFT. It should not be considered the exclusive source for this type of information.

Please talk to your doctor or nurse about your questions and concerns.



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What is QFT?

QuantiFERON®-TB Gold In-Tube (QFT) is a blood test that can help diagnose tuberculosis (TB) infection. QFT, an interferon-gamma release assay, ie. IGRA, is a major scientific advance over the 110-year-old tuberculin skin test (or Mantoux), giving greater accuracy and a more reliable result.

What is latent TB?

TB infection, also referred to as latent TB, occurs when a person has the bacteria that cause TB in his or her body, but the bacteria are not causing any disease or symptoms. If you are diagnosed with latent TB there is a chance that the bacteria may cause disease in the future, so you are likely to be offered treatment to prevent this from happening.

What does the QFT test involve?

A sample of blood is collected and sent to the laboratory for analysis.

Are there any risks associated with having the QFT test?

No, there are no risks associated with having the test, apart from the slight discomfort of having a blood sample taken.

How does QFT work?

QFT is a laboratory test that uses special blood collection tubes coated with antigens (small non-infectious bits of the TB bacterium) for blood collection and subsequent testing. These antigens are very specific for detecting TB infection. When the blood of an individual infected with TB comes in contact with these antigens, a chemical messenger (interferon gamma) is released into the blood. The QFT results are based on the amount of interferon-gamma that is produced in the tubes.

In what situations can QFT be used?

QFT may be used in all instances in which a skin test has traditionally been used. The updated US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) TB testing guidelines (published June 25, 2010) recommend this type of blood test for many people including those who are BCG vaccinated. You may be tested if you:

- have been in contact with someone who has been diagnosed with TB
- have recently come from a country with high levels of TB
- have a reduced immune system
- are starting certain types of medications.

How are QFT test results interpreted?

Proper assessment of individuals suspected of infection with TB takes into consideration medical history and test results, for which QFT is an essential component. Your medical practitioner/nurse is in the best position to advise you on what a QFT result means in your situation. However, in most circumstances:

- a positive QFT result suggests that TB infection is likely
- a negative QFT result suggests that TB infection is unlikely
- an indeterminate result, which is uncommon, may suggest the need for further investigations or repeating the test.

How long before I get results?

A QFT result may be available within 24 hours of blood collection. However, this may vary depending on how frequently the laboratory in your area carries out the test. Your medical practitioner/nurse is in the best position to tell you when you will receive your test result