

Testing for tuberculosis (TB)

Information for clinicians and health workers

Active pulmonary tuberculosis (TB) is best identified through sputum tests and chest x-rays.

Latent TB infection can be detected through skin and blood tests.

If you suspect a patient may have TB, all sputa samples and any biopsies (sent fresh) should be sent to SA Pathology. SA Pathology is home to the International Mycobacterial Reference Laboratory. TB samples sent to SA Pathology are processed onsite and not sent interstate. This ensures rapid turnaround of results.

SA Pathology will advise SA TB Services when any positive cases are identified. SA TB Services will then work with you and your patient to develop and manage a treatment plan, as well as manage contact tracing.

Please contact SA TB Services with any queries or concerns at any time on **(08) 7074 1089**.

For after-hours emergencies, call the Royal Adelaide Hospital on (08) 7074 0000 to speak to the on-call thoracic registrar or consultant.

Sputum tests

A sputum test is the best way to test for active pulmonary TB in someone presenting with symptoms such as a prolonged or bloody cough, fever, sweats, lumps in the throat or unexplained weight loss.

Three separate samples are required on three consecutive days. There is a fact sheet for patients on how to collect sputum for testing.

Samples should be sent to SA Pathology, which will alert SA TB Services to any positive results. Initial test results take 24-48 hours however it takes six to eight weeks for a final culture.

Chest X-ray

A chest x-ray may show abnormalities in the lungs suggestive of active pulmonary TB.

Skin and blood tests

A Mantoux tuberculin skin test (TST) or QuantiferonGOLD interferon gamma release assay (IGRA) blood test can be used to identify people with latent infection however can give false negatives in active TB disease.

In older children and young adults, they may also show a positive reading if a person has had the BCG vaccine as a child.

A TST requires two steps – a tuberculin injection into the skin and then a reaction examination by a trained examiner 48 to 72 hours later.

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Other tests

Diagnosing multidrug-resistant and other resistant forms of TB as well as HIV-associated TB can be complex and expensive. TB is particularly difficult to diagnose in children.

SA TB Services will ensure all people with TB are referred to appropriate services to treat any other symptoms that require further investigation.

Contact SA TB Services if you have any concerns.

For more information:

Royal Adelaide Hospital, SA TB Services

Telephone: (08) 7074 1089 (business hours)

www.sahealth.sa.gov.au

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