

Latent Tuberculosis - QuantiFERON®-TB Gold Plus (QFT)

What is latent tuberculosis (TB)?

Most people exposed to and infected with the bacterium which causes TB have no symptoms and never develop active TB disease, as the immune system controls the infection. The bacteria however can become **latent** (or dormant) within the body. Approximately 10% of people with latent TB infection will develop symptomatic TB disease at some stage during their lifetime. This is more common in people who receive drugs which suppress the immune system, such as chemotherapy or biological agents for inflammatory conditions such as inflammatory bowel disease or rheumatoid arthritis. Antibiotic treatment may be recommended for people with latent TB who are at risk of developing symptomatic TB disease.

How do you test for latent TB infection?

As people with latent TB infection do not have active TB disease, tests for latent TB rely on detecting the response of the immune system to TB infection. The two available tests include: (1) tuberculin skin test (or Mantoux test) and (2) QuantiFERON®-TB Gold Plus.

What is QuantiFERON®-TB Gold Plus Test (QFT)?

QuantiFERON®-TB Gold Plus is a blood test that can help to diagnosis people with latent TB infection. It is as effective as the Mantoux test in identifying latent TB infection, however may be more advantageous in people who have previously been vaccinated against TB (BCG vaccine) or who find it difficult accessing Mantoux testing. However, neither test can distinguish latent TB infection from active TB disease. If active TB disease is suspected, then alternative tests, such as sputum culture, are required to grow the bacterium.

Please note: Due to COVID19, as QFT has special collection and handling requirements, Out-patient sample collection can now **only be collected at the ACT Pathology collection centre located at:**

- **The Canberra Hospital (51242816), Monday to Thursday between the hours of 7:30 am and 4:00 pm** (excluding Public holidays and not on the day prior to a public holiday)

How much does it cost to have a QFT?

QFT is covered under Medicare (**MUST** be indicated on request form) for:

- (a) A person exposed to a confirmed case of active tuberculosis
- (b) A person who is infected with human immunodeficiency virus
- (c) A person who is to commence, or has commenced, tumour necrosis inhibitor therapy
- (d) A person who is to commence, or has commenced, renal dialysis
- (e) A person with silicosis
- (f) A person who is, or is about to become, immunosuppressed because of disease or medical treatment

Patients will be asked to sign a declaration form acknowledging that they are willing to pay for the cost of this service if they are **not** covered by one of the Medicare indications, as indicated on the request form. The cost of the test is currently \$49.50 (GST included).

How long will the result take?

Results will be available within 1-2 weeks of the specimen being collected.

For further information, contact Clinical Microbiologists Dr Karina Kennedy or Dr Chong Ong.

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