

Respiratory medicine: Chest Clinic

BCG vaccination protection against Tuberculosis

What is tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis (often called TB) is an infection caused by a germ called **Mycobacterium tuberculosis**. It can affect any organ of the body but most commonly the lung.

What does BCG mean?

The initials stand for Bacillus (germ) of Calmette and Guerin, two Frenchmen who discovered the vaccine which protects against tuberculosis. It does offer a very high degree of protection against tuberculosis but has no value in the treatment of TB, although there is no guarantee that tuberculosis will never develop in an immunised person.

Who needs BCG?

In this area, all babies whose parents or grandparents are from a country with high TB levels are offered the BCG vaccination soon after birth. Occasionally these babies are unable to have the BCG vaccination at birth and they can come to the Chest Clinic for it. In addition, any adult who has not previously been vaccinated and may be at risk of exposure to TB, for example healthcare workers and travellers to areas of the world where TB is still very common, may also be vaccinated here at the Chest Clinic.

Who does not need a BCG vaccination?

Many of us by the time we are adults, have been exposed to the germ that causes TB and have developed natural resistance to the disease. Such people do not require vaccination.

If someone has previously been given a BCG vaccination, they should not need a second one. Routine BCG vaccination of school children is no longer available.

How do we know who needs protection?

Before being given the BCG vaccination, everyone over the age of six years is given a tuberculin skin test (TST). Those under six years of age may have a TST if clinically indicated. This is a simple skin test performed on the inside of the left forearm. Two to three days later the test is read (the timing is very important; a repeat test may be necessary if not read at the correct time). If the result is negative the vaccine is given.

In some people an area of redness and swelling appears at the test site. This is called a positive reaction. This does not necessarily mean the person has TB but may have either previously been vaccinated or have their own natural resistance. They will not need a BCG.

The BCG vaccination

This is carried out on the same day as the TST is read. The vaccination process is simple. A tiny quantity of vaccine is injected into the skin on the upper left arm.

Will it make me feel ill?

No.

What will happen after the vaccination?

In about two to three weeks time you will probably develop a small boil where the injection was given. The area around the boil may be a little tender.

How long does the boil last?

It varies slightly from person to person but usually lasts about six to eight weeks and will leave a small scar.

Do I have to treat it in any special way?

If the boil discharges any fluid you should cover it with a piece of gauze, otherwise no special measures are required.

Can I wash it?

Yes, the area may be washed with soap and water at any time.

Can I use an elastoplast?

No (except when swimming – see below).

Can I swim?

Yes. If you do swim this is the only time elastoplasts should be used. You should cover the area with a large waterproof plaster before entering the pool and take it off after swimming. This will prevent infection.

Will I need to have a further BCG?

No.

Caution: Do not have any further vaccinations in the same arm that the BCG was given for three months.

Certificate of BCG Vaccination

This is to certify that:

Name:.....
Date of Birth.....
Address:.....
.....
.....
.....

Received:

Date of Mantoux skin test:.....
Result of Mantoux skin test:.....

Date of BCG:.....
Batch Number:.....
Expiry Date:.....

Signature:.....

Designation:.....

Please ask if you require this information in other languages, large print or audio format:
01223 216032 or patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

Potete chiedere di ottenere queste informazioni in altre lingue, in stampato grande o in audiocassetta.

Italian

若你需要本信息的繁體中文、大字體或音訊格式的版本，請要求索取。

Cantonese

तमने आ माळिती बीछ भाषाओमां, मोटा अक्षरोमां अथवा सांभजी शकाय जेवा माध्यम
(ओडीओ डोर्मेट)मां जेठती छोय तो कृपा करीने पूछो.

Gujarati

تکایہ پرسیار بگہ نہ گہر نہ وزانیاریہت دہوی بہ زمانیکی تر . بہ پیتی گہورہ یانیش بہ شیوہی دہنگ

Kurdish

آگراپ کو یہ معلومات دوسری زبانوں میں، بڑے الفاظ کی اشاعت میں یا آڈیو ٹیپ پروکارہوں تو ہر اے مہربانی اس کیلئے درخواست کریں۔

Urdu



Addenbrooke's is smoke-free. Please do not smoke anywhere on the site.
For advice on quitting, contact your GP or the NHS smoking helpline free, 0800
169 0 169

Document history

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