

# Understanding the QuantiFERON-TB Gold Test: A Simple Guide

## Introduction

Tuberculosis, or TB as it's commonly known, is a serious health issue worldwide. Finding it early is key to treating it effectively. There's a modern test called the QuantiFERON-TB Gold Test that makes diagnosing TB quicker and more accurate. Let's break down what this test is and why it's important in simple terms.



## What is the QuantiFERON-TB Gold Test?

In plain language, the QuantiFERON-TB Gold Test is a blood test designed by Quest Diagnostics that helps doctors figure out if you have TB. In technical terms it's sometimes called an IGRA test (Interferon-Gamma Release Assay). It's more advanced and faster than the old skin test method and doesn't get mixed up with the TB vaccination, making the results more reliable.

## How Does it Work?

This test checks how your immune system reacts to TB bacteria. The doctors take a sample of your blood and mix it with substances that reveal TB if it's there. If your immune cells react, it means TB bacteria might be in your body, and the doctors will do more checks to be sure.

## The Advantages

### Quick Results

You can expect results often within 3-4 days. QuantiFERON Gold test results time is especially short, making the waiting game less stressful.

## **Accurate**

These tests are designed to avoid the mix-ups caused by BCG vaccines - a common issue with older tests. They are done at our [London Patient Reception](#) which is centrally placed.

## **One Visit**

Say goodbye to return doctor visits. These tests require just one trip, saving time and hassle. The older 2-step TB tests, such as Mantoux and PPD, involved injecting a substance into the skin and then having to return to the clinic to read the result a few days later.

## **When It's Used**

### **Finding Hidden TB**

The QuantiFERON test is really useful for spotting TB that isn't showing any symptoms yet – a sneaky version of the disease that can turn active and make you sick years later. The test is very accurate and will give you a positive or negative result. Indeterminate or in-between results are rare.

### **Keeping an Eye on At-Risk People**

People like healthcare workers, folks moving to the UK from countries where TB is common, and people living or working in crowded places can benefit from this test because they're at higher risk of getting TB.

### **Helping Stop TB from Spreading**

By finding and treating hidden TB before it can turn active, this test is a big help in the fight to stop TB from spreading.

## **Interpreting the Results**

## **Negative Test:**

**TB infection unlikely.**

## **Positive Test:**

### **Latent TB or Active TB Infection.**

A "QuantiFERON positive" result means that the test has detected TB bacteria in your body. However, that does not mean that you have an active TB infection. You might have something called latent TB (explained below) or had an infection sometime in the past. Only further testing by a doctor, such as having a chest x-ray, can tell if you have an active TB infection in your body.

## **Indeterminate Test:**

### **Results cannot be interpreted.**

An indeterminate QuantiFERON result means the test cannot tell if TB infection is present or not. This happens in less than 2% of healthy people and occurs infrequently. Usually the test will need to be repeated or another type of test should be done.

Indeterminate results should be interpreted with caution in HIV positive people.

## **Latent TB**

Latent TB is a condition where the tuberculosis bacteria are present in your body, but they're inactive. It's like having uninvited guests who are asleep in your house; they're present, but not causing any trouble (yet).

In medical terms, this means you're not showing any symptoms of the disease and you're not contagious. Your immune system, the body's defence army, has managed to contain the bacteria, preventing them from spreading or causing illness. That is the case in most healthy, young people because TB is a weak infection and usually only causes active infection when your immune system is weakened.

However, there's a catch. Even though the bacteria are inactive, there's always a risk they could "wake up" and become active, especially if your immune system becomes weakened due to factors like stress, other illnesses, or when you get older. About 10% of people with latent TB will develop active TB infection in their lifetime.

The QuantiFERON test can check for latent TB before it becomes active and causes any problems. This allows people to be treated to prevent future active infection.

## Summary

In a nutshell, the QuantiFERON-TB Gold Test is a fast, reliable, and convenient way to find out if someone has TB. It's especially handy for spotting the disease before it starts showing symptoms, which is a game-changer in the effort to control TB and keep communities healthy.

For those with a "QuantiFERON positive" result, it's essential to understand that it indicates exposure to TB bacteria and not necessarily active TB. Further investigations and consultations with your doctor will be needed to find out for sure.