TB Information & Explanation

'TB' is short for a disease called tuberculosis. TB is spread by tiny germs that can float in the air. The TB germs may spray into the air if a person with Active TB Disease of the lungs or throat coughs, shouts, or sneezes. Anyone can breathe the TB germs into their lungs.

TB germs can live in the body for years without making you sick. This is called TB infection. Your own immune system traps the germs and protects you from actual TB Disease.

Sometimes, our body’s immune system becomes compromised (ex. Cancer, meningitis, or other severe illnesses) and the TB germ can break away and spread, causing active disease.

TB Skin test is the only way to tell if you have been exposed to the TB germ. This test is done on the forearm and must be read between 48 and 72 hours. A “positive” test is when a bump appears on your arm. The bump is measured in millimeters. The size of the bump along with your history will determine if the test is positive or negative. A positive test only shows that you have been exposed to the TB germ and you have TB infection.

A chest x-ray will need to be done on anyone with a positive TB test. The chest x-ray will determine if you have Active Disease.

If the chest x-ray is negative, you will be sent to the State Health Department and offered preventative treatment. The state health department physician will look at your x-ray films and evaluate you. He/she will then offer a treatment course where you will be given medications specific to “kill” the TB germ that is in your body so you will not need to worry about active disease. This treatment course is for a period of 270 days or 9 months. After your course of treatment you will be given a letter from the State Health Department stating:

- No more TB tests
- You have completed your course of preventative therapy
- Chest x-ray will only be needed if you have chronic cough, weight loss, and/or night sweats.

To make sure your test is read correctly, it must be administered and read by staff at the keeling Health Center. If you have any questions, contact Keeling Health Center (814-393-2121).