In many countries, medicines are not used for tuberculosis (TB) until people become sick. Here in the U.S., we try to keep your family healthy by using medicine before you get sick. That’s why we use the TB skin test as a part of regular checkups.

The TB skin test is to find out if you have TB germs in your body. Even if you are feeling well, you could have TB germs in the body in a sleeping state, like dormant seeds in a field. As long as they are dormant, they will not make you sick. But someday even years from now, these dormant seeds could start growing and make you sick. Fortunately there is a medicine that can kill the sleeping TB germs, like killing the seeds in a field before they grow into weeds. The arm test is to find out if you should have the medicine to stay healthy and strong.

The skin test works by having a small amount of fluid injected with a needle just underneath the skin on your arm. The fluid does not contain any germs and will not make you sick or give you TB. Though it is given with a needle, it is not an immunization and will not protect you from illness. After two or three days, come back to the clinic to have a nurse look at your arm. By looking at the skin where the test was injected, the nurse will be able to tell whether your have TB germs sleeping in your body. If you do, the doctor may recommend a chest x-ray to see if your lungs are healthy. The doctor will also talk with you about taking medicines to kill any TB germs in your body and to keep you healthy.

Please ask your doctor or nurse any questions you have about TB or the TB skin test. They will be happy to answer them for you.