

**Explain my culture result.**

Sputum was collected as part of testing you for tuberculosis. This was done because you have a "positive" skin test, an abnormal chest x-ray, symptoms suggestive of tuberculosis (TB), or your doctor's request. These specimens were cultured for the bacteria that causes TB and the TB germ was not found. However, a bacteria similar to the TB germ was found. The presence of this bacteria frequently is of no significance but in some persons it means an infection or disease like TB is present.

**What is a nontuberculous mycobacteria?**

Both the TB germ and these other germs (there are several of them) are called mycobacteria. These germs are called nontuberculous mycobacteria (NTM), to tell them from the TB germ. These NTM germs are found all around us in dust, soil, water, milk, food and in some domestic and wild animals. NTM germs may be found on the skin and in body secretions. The NTM germs are hardy and can survive in the environment for long periods of time.

**How are NTM germs "caught"?**

The NTM germs may enter the body through the lungs by breathing, through the gut by eating or drinking or through the skin by a cut or wound being contaminated by water or dirt containing NTM germs. NTM germs are not "caught" from another person. People who have, for example, an NTM in their sputum cannot transmit infection due to the NTM to another person.

**Does this germ mean I have disease?**

Not necessarily. Finding NTM in one sputum specimen does not indicate disease. NTM are found frequently in patients with a chronic cough, such as smokers, and in patients with lung disease, such as COPD or emphysema. These germs can be present and live in body secretions, like sputum, without causing disease. If you are a smoker or have COPD or emphysema, the presence of an NTM in your sputum probably is not important. Your doctor may indicate no treatment is necessary but want to see you and x-ray you every 3-6 months to make sure disease is not developing.

**What is nontuberculous mycobacterial disease?**

When an NTM causes disease the symptoms and x-ray changes may seem just like those of TB. You cannot have disease without symptoms, such as: a cough lasting longer than 3 weeks, blood in the sputum, weight loss, night sweats or fever. For pulmonary disease, your chest x-ray will be abnormal and may have cavities, such as are found with TB. NTM disease can be found in lymph glands in the neck in children. NTM disease occurs frequently in persons who are HIV infected or have a damaged immune system for some other reason. An NTM germ should be found in two or more cultures in a patient with symptoms and an abnormal chest x-ray before NTM disease is thought to be present. Disease caused by an NTM is called mycobacteriosis. If significant symptoms are present, treatment will be necessary. This treatment will involve 2-3 drugs and will be prolonged, 6-12 months or longer. Your doctor may desire that a specialist in lung or infectious diseases give consultation about treatment of your NTM disease.

Disease caused by NTM in lymph nodes in the neck will be treated with surgery instead of drugs.

**Does the presence of this NTM germ mean I don't have TB?**

Perhaps. In some patients both the TB germ and an NTM germ are grown from the sputum. When this occurs the TB germ is usually grown first with the NTM germ found later. The presence of an NTM germ does not mean TB is back or your TB treatment has failed.

For persons who have "positive" TB skin tests, the health department TB doctor may have diagnosed you with TB infection or inactive TB disease. You need treatment for the TB infection or inactive TB disease as recommended by the TB doctor, even though an NTM grew in your sputum.