

Education

Blood Culture Test

What is a blood culture test?

A blood culture is a test done to see if a bacterial or fungal infection has spread to your bloodstream. The blood culture allows your health care provider to identify the specific bacteria or fungus causing the infection. Because an infection in the blood can be very serious infection, it is important to know what kind of bacteria or fungus is causing it and what medicine will best treat the infection.

Why is this test done?

Usually this test is done when you have signs of an infection and your provider suspects the infection may have spread to your blood.

How do I prepare for this test?

Make sure your health care provider knows about any medicines (especially antibiotics), herbs, or supplements that you are taking. Don't stop any of your regular medicines without first consulting your health care provider.

How is the test done?

The skin on your arm is cleaned very well and then a small amount of blood is taken from your arm with a needle. Blood may be taken from more than 1 site. The blood is collected in tubes and sent to a lab.

Having this test will take just a few minutes of your time. There is no risk of getting AIDS, hepatitis, or any other blood-borne disease from this test.

How will I get the test result?

Ask your health care provider when and how you will get the result of your test.

What does the test result mean?

A blood culture test is positive if a bacteria or fungus grows in the culture. It is negative if nothing grows. If the test is negative, your health care provider may recommend that the test be repeated in several hours or days.

There are 2 possibilities when the test is positive. The first possibility is that the bacteria or fungus grown in the blood culture are from an infection in your blood. The second possibility is that bacteria or fungus found in the blood culture are contaminants from your skin and were not actually in your blood. Your health care provider will decide whether or not the organisms grown in the culture are contaminants.

If the test is positive and the bacteria or fungus is determined to have infected your blood, then different kinds of antibiotics will be tested in the lab to see which medicine you can take to best treat the infection.

What if my test result is not normal?

Test results are only one part of a larger picture that takes into account your medical history and current health. Sometimes a test needs to be repeated to check the first result. Talk to your health care provider about your result and ask questions. If your test results are not normal, ask your health care provider:

- if you need more tests
- what you need to do to have a normal value
- when you need to be tested again.

