The Booster Phenomenon

A person becomes infected with *M. tuberculosis*

Over time, a person’s ability to react to tuberculin lessens.

The person receives a tuberculin skin test

The person has a negative reaction because of a decreased ability to react to tuberculin. However, this skin test “jogs the memory” of the immune system to recognize and react to tuberculin.

Up to 1 year later (For this example, we assume the person was NOT exposed to TB during this time).

The person is skin tested again

The person has a positive reaction. This is a boosted reaction due to TB infection that occurred a long time ago, not during the interval between the two skin tests.
Two-Step Testing

Baseline skin test

Reaction

Negative

Retest 1-3 weeks later

Reaction

Negative

Person probably does NOT have TB infection

Retest at regular intervals; a positive reaction will probably be due to recent TB infection

Positive

Person probably has TB infection

Retesting not necessary

Positive

The reaction is considered a boosted reaction (due to TB infection that occurred a long time ago)

Retesting not necessary