Reviewer's report

Title: The presence of a booster phenomenon among contacts of active pulmonary tuberculosis cases: a retrospective cohort.

Version: Date: 19 December 2006

Reviewer: Cynthia Chee

Reviewer's report:

General

The low rate of boosting would support the authors' conclusion that two-step TST testing among contacts in their community may not be worthwhile.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

1. Page 7, para 2: "International guidelines" should be more precisely referred to as from "North America" (where BCG is not widely used - to my knowledge, countries with mass BCG vaccination use a higher TST cut-off to advise isoniazid preventive treatment even in close contacts). Should specify the mm increase in induration for definition of tuberculin conversion.

2. Sentences in the last para of Discussion (pg 9) need rephrasing for clarity.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

1. The authors could discuss the arguments for and against abandoning two-step testing in their population, based on their finding of a low rate of boosting.

2. It would be interesting to know if the TST conversion rate was as low as the rate of boosting.

3. Is there available information regarding the other contact characteristics such as ethnicity, rural vs urban origin, which may shed light on the unexpectedly low rate of boosting given the relatively high TB incidence in Rio? ie. perhaps these contacts were not representative of the city’s population?

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.