

What is tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis is an infectious disease caused by the tubercle bacillus, or Koch's bacillus, which attacks the lungs and sometimes the kidneys, bones and glands.

How does infection occur?

Tuberculosis is almost exclusively transmitted by air.

People with infectious or active (open) tuberculosis of the lung expel tubercle bacilli into the air when they cough, talk or sneeze.

People in the vicinity may breathe in these bacilli. If they do and the bacilli penetrate into the lungs, they will cause a minor lung inflammation.

A healthy body automatically produces antibodies, typically in adequate quantities to fight the spread of the disease. The inflammation may spread in people with reduced resistance, so the bacilli are able to reach other organs through the blood and lymphatic system (kidneys, glands, bones and so on).

Infection is not possible through household objects, cutlery, books, food and so on.

Who can contract tuberculosis?

Anyone can contract tuberculosis.

Young children and people with a low resistance are much more at risk of contracting tuberculosis.

What are the symptoms of tuberculosis?

The most common symptoms of active tuberculosis are persistent cough, often with phlegm, reduced appetite, weight loss, chest pain, fever, night sweats and tiredness.

The symptoms will not necessarily appear at the same time.

Some people with tuberculosis may not even display any of these symptoms!

Is there a cure for tuberculosis?

Yes, people can make a full recovery from tuberculosis.

The treatment usually comprises three or four antibiotics, which are best taken together on an empty stomach.

The medication must be taken for no fewer than six months, as the tubercle bacilli are difficult to destroy.

When is someone at risk of infecting others?

A disease is infectious if tubercle bacilli are found in the phlegm (active tuberculosis of the lung).

A person with inactive (closed) tuberculosis of the lung or other organ is not usually at risk of infecting others.

If successful, a few weeks of treatment will lead to a reduction in coughing and infectiousness, but this does not mean that the disease is cured.

Taking care when coughing can also reduce the risk of infection. That means coughing into a paper handkerchief in your hand.

Why and how are others tested for tuberculosis?

People who live or work with a person with infectious tuberculosis of the lung must be tested to see whether they are infected or perhaps even ill themselves.

Younger people usually undergo a skin test (tuberculin sensitivity test or Mantou test), while older people undergo a lung X-ray.

Together with the patient, the VRGT nurse puts together a list of people the patient has been in regular physical contact with recently, including family, friends, colleagues, classmates and members of any club.

People that live or work close to a recently infected person must also be examined to find out whether they are carrying infection.

Bronvermelding: Vlaamse Vereniging voor Respiratoire Gezondheidszorg en Tuberculosebestrijding vzw (www.vrgt.be)

Think about your health! Have yourself vaccinated!

Many diseases are caused by a viral or bacterial infection. The name and cause of 16 dangerous infectious diseases are listed below, stating the medical name and the disease's name in Dutch and in English.

	MEDISCHE NAAM van de OORZAAK [virus of bacterie]	ZIEKTE IN HET NEDERLANDS	ZIEKTE IN UW TAAL
1	Polio [virus]	Kinderverlamming	Polio
2	Difterie [bacterie]	Kroep	Diphtheria
3	Tetanus [bacterie]	Klem	Tetanus
4	Pertussis [bacterie]	Kinkhoest	Whooping cough
5	H.influenzae type b (Hib) [bacterie]	Hersenvliesontsteking door Hib	Meningitis caused by Hib
6	Hepatitis B (HB) [virus]	Geelzucht door HB	Jaundice caused by Hepatitis B
7	Mazelen [virus]	Mazelen	Measles
8	Bof [virus]	Dikoor	Mumps
9	Rubella [virus]	Rode hond	German measles
10	Meningokok van serogroep C [bacterie]	Hersenvliesontsteking door Meningokok C	Meningococcal C meningitis
11	Pneumokok [bacterie]	Hersenvliesontsteking door Pneumokok	Pneumococcal meningitis
12	Rota [virus]	Diarree door Rotavirus	Diarrhoea caused by Rotavirus
13	Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) [virus]	Baarmoederhalskanker door HPV	Cervical cancer caused by HPV
14	Hepatitis A (HA) [virus]	Geelzucht door HA	Jaundice cause by Hepatitis A
15	Influenza [virus]	Griep	Flu
16	TBC [bacterie]	Tuberculose	Tuberculosis

Vaccination is important in the fight against infectious diseases. Many vaccines are available for free from the government. For more information, see the Flemish government's website at www.zorg-en-gezondheid.be/vaccinatie.aspx.

Vaccination protects you from diseases with the following symptoms:

1. Poliomyelitis (Polio)

Muscle paralysis (arms and legs, stomach, swallowing and breathing muscles) muscle shortening and abnormal bone growth (especially among children in the growth period) and inflammation of the brain membrane. Often life-long palsy damage. Compulsory vaccination in Belgium since 1967 has kept the disease from spreading.

2. Diphtheria

Serious inflammation of the throat and airways resulting in breathing difficulties and sometimes death. Infection is spread through the air (coughing, sneezing) and through hand contact. To provide effective protection, vaccination must be repeated every ten years.

3. Lockjaw (Tetanus)

Uncontrolled and painful muscle clamps, first in the face and later in the back and neck. Sometimes lethal due to spasms of the muscles that control breathing. Infection is mostly through (dirty) skin wounds on the street. Vaccination can still be started soon after infection. Full vaccination provides at least ten years' protection.

4. Whooping cough (Pertussis)

Long coughing fits with expulsion of hard mucus. Very dangerous for young children, sometimes lethal. Highly infectious through the air and hand contact.

5. Meningitis caused by Hib

Hib penetrates deep into the body through the nose and can cause a lot of inflammation, especially of the brain membrane (meningitis). Very dangerous for children under five years of age, sometimes lethal. Infection through the air and hand contact. Higher risk in populous areas.

6. Jaundice caused by Hepatitis B

Often unnoticed infection, sometimes acute hepatitis with jaundice. This can lead to chronic hepatitis after six months with such complications as cirrhosis and cancer of the liver. Highly infectious, especially through blood and sexual contact. Not spread through the air, food or water.

7. Measles

Fever with pink skin rash on the entire body. Highly infectious through the air and saliva. Dangerous complications are inflammation of the middle ear, lungs and brain tissue. Sometimes lethal, especially in very young children or in the event of malnutrition and chronic illness.

8. Mumps

Fever and swelling of the salivary glands. Inflammation of the brain tissue and the brain membranes is a possible complication. After puberty, inflammation of the testicles is possible in boys (sterility is rare). Infection through the air or saliva.

9. German measles (Rubella)

Fever with pink skin rash on the entire body and swollen glands. Complications are joint inflammations (common) and brain tissue inflammation (uncommon, sometimes lethal). Very dangerous for pregnant women during the first three months of pregnancy: the baby may be born blind or deaf or exhibit other serious complications. Infection is through air or saliva.

10. Meningococcal C meningitis

May cause inflammation of the brain membranes, brain tissue inflammation and blood poisoning. In Belgium most meningococcus bacteria are group B and C. A vaccination is available only against meningococcus C. Young children (up to 5 years of age) and adolescents (15-19 years) are most at risk.

11. Pneumococcal meningitis

May cause inflammation of the brain membranes, inflammation of the lung, inflammation of the middle ear and blood poisoning. This disease may require urgent treatment within a few hours. There is a vaccine for infants and a vaccine for adults.

12. Diarrhoea caused by Rotavirus

The main cause of severe diarrhoea in Belgium and the most frequent reason for hospital admissions among children younger than five years of age (due to risk of dehydration). Vaccination is recommended for all infants younger than six months of age. The vaccine is administered through the mouth.

13. Cervical cancer caused by HPV

Infection can result in cancer of the cervix in women. Girls should be vaccinated before they become sexually active. Screening (smear examination) is also necessary.

14. Jaundiced cause by Hepatitis A

Infection (through contact with faeces) occurs when hygiene is poor, especially trips to developing countries. The older the person, the more severe the problem. In almost all cases, adults contract jaundice, followed by a long period of tiredness. After recovery permanent damage is very uncommon. The fatal complication of acute liver failure is rare.

15. Flu (influenza)

Infection is through inhalation or hand contact. Known signs of the disease are fever, shivering, coughing, headache, sore throat, muscle pains and tiredness. A full recovery may take up to two weeks. Old people and the chronically ill run a high risk of complications, which may be lethal.

Tackling tuberculosis (TB) in Belgium**Tuberculosis (TB)**

Tuberculosis usually attacks the lungs, which results in coughing, also with blood, and weight loss. It is a life-threatening infectious disease, especially transmitted through coughing. It occurs mostly in developing countries. TB also occurs in Belgium, but it is nowhere near as common as it used to be. TB can be treated effectively with a (long) course of medication. There is a BCG vaccine against TB, but vaccination is only practical for infants in high-risk countries. Vaccination is not practised in Belgium. The recommended approach in Belgium is quick detection and treatment. For more information, see www.vrgt.be/tbc.htm.

Dit document is gebaseerd op een tekst van de werkgroep infecties van Logo stad Antwerpen.