



National Institute for Public Health
and the Environment
Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport

What is tuberculosis?



What is tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis (TB) is an infectious disease caused by a bacterium. It often occurs in the lungs, but it can also be located in other parts of the body. TB can often be treated well with medicines. TB is rare in the Netherlands.

How do I recognise TB?

TB is caused by a bacterium. The disease can develop months or years after being infected with the bacterium. Not everyone who gets infected becomes ill. People who do get ill usually have TB in the lungs, or in another part of the body, such as the bones, lymph nodes or vertebrae. People with TB may experience symptoms such as:

Common symptoms



coughing
for more
than three
weeks



night
sweats



weight
loss



loss of
appetite



fatigue



fever

Other symptoms are:

- coughing up mucus or blood
- difficulty breathing
- chest pains
- swollen glands (in the case of glandular TB)
- pain, swelling (in the case of TB in the bones)

How do I know if I have TB?

If you recognise any of the symptoms associated with TB, you should call your GP. Your GP may refer you to another physician. A physician can run several tests to find out if you have TB:

- An X-ray or scan
- A test of the mucus from the lungs
- Other tests, if you might have TB outside the lungs

What is the difference between being infected with TB and being ill with TB?

Infected with TB

If a person is infected with the tuberculosis bacterium but they have not become ill, this is called a TB infection. Someone who is infected with TB is not contagious to others.

This leaflet is about being ill with TB. For more information on being infected with TB, see the [TB Infection leaflet](#).

Ill with TB

One in ten people infected with TB actually gets ill. This can happen after a few months, or even after years. The likelihood of becoming ill after being infected is greatest in the first 2 years.

TB is common in the lungs

This may be contagious, but it does not have to be. If a person has TB in the lungs, a physician will check if they have infectious TB.

TB can also occur in the bones, lymph nodes, vertebrae or other parts of the body. In those cases, it is not contagious.

How do I get TB?

Only someone with infectious TB can infect others. Coughing, sneezing, talking or singing can release small droplets of the tuberculosis bacteria into the air. Other people can breathe in these droplets and get infected.

How is TB not transmitted?

You will not get TB by:

- shaking hands, hugging or kissing someone on the cheek
- sharing food and drink
- using someone else's cup, plates, cutlery, clothes, toilet
- sex
- contact with blood

Source and contact tracing

The Municipal Health Department (GGD) helps people with TB. Sometimes the GGD conducts an investigation to find out where an infection has come from. This is called **source tracing**. Someone with infectious TB can infect others. The GGD therefore investigates the people in that person's immediate environment. This is called **contact tracing**. The aim of contact investigation is to find and treat people infected with the tuberculosis bacterium as early as possible. This is to prevent the disease from developing in these people.

More information about source and contact tracing can be found in the leaflet TB and [source and contact tracing](#).

Can TB be treated?

TB can often be treated well with a combination of different medicines. The treatment usually takes 6 months.

More information about the treatment of TB can be found in the leaflet [TB and how we treat it?](#)

Measures in case of infectious TB

If someone has infectious TB, that person will stay separated from others for at least 2 weeks. This prevents the bacterium from spreading and is called isolation.

More information on measures to treat infectious TB can be found in the folder [TB-transmission, coughing hygiene and rules of daily behaviour.](#)

Who can get infected with TB?

Some people are more likely to get infected with the tuberculosis bacterium:

- People who have been in a room with someone who has infectious TB.
- People who were born in a country where TB is common.
- People travelling to areas where TB is common, for example Africa, Asia, South America and Eastern Europe.

Who can get ill with TB?

Some people are more likely to get ill with TB:

- Children under the age of 5 years.
- People who have an impaired immune system due to illness.
- People who use medicine that weakens their immune system.

Who can be vaccinated against TB?

In the Netherlands, the BCG vaccination against TB is offered to children who have a parent who was born in a country where TB is common. Children can have the vaccination at a very young age. The vaccination does not provide 100% protection against getting TB. However, the risk of a severe form of TB, such as meningitis, is much lower after vaccination.

The BCG vaccination does not protect adults as well as it does children. Therefore, only some adults are advised to have the BCG vaccination.

More information can be found in the leaflets [BCG vaccination](#) and [Travel and TB](#).

More information

- More information about TB can be found at rivm.nl/tuberculose.
- If you have questions about TB, please contact the GGD's TB Control Department in your region. You can find your GGD at ggd.nl.

This information is available in English at:

Waxaad warbixintan ku aqrisan kartaa Soomaaliga:

Informacje te są dostępne w języku polskim na stronie:

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شما میتوانید این معلومات را به دریاژ طریق ذیل مطالعه کنید:

يمكنك قراءة هذه المعلومات باللغة العربية على:



[www.rivm.nl/en/tuberculosis/
information-materials#aboutTB](http://www.rivm.nl/en/tuberculosis/information-materials#aboutTB)



Ask your question to the TB chatbot
www.tuberculose.nl/over-tuberculose

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