

ITM inaugurates a new high-security laboratory

The laboratory is equipped to carry out advanced research into tuberculosis.

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Dit is de omschrijving

The Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM) today inaugurates a new high-security laboratory to carry out advanced research into tuberculosis (TB). This new laboratory offers the Institute the flexibility needed to tackle new viruses and parasites if need be. The expansion and upgrade of this facility was funded by the National Lottery players.

ITM is not only an international player in TB diagnosis and research, but also houses a reference laboratory for the World Health Organization.

Dr Leen Rigouts, head of the TB laboratory: "We urgently needed more space to carry out our reference tasks and to further strengthen our international reputation. The advance of multi-drug resistant TB also calls for increasingly stringent control measures to protect laboratory staff. "

The notion "biosafety level" (BSL) is used to identify the level of precautionary measures needed in a laboratory. BSL1 is the lowest and BSL4 the highest level of containment. A subsidy of 400.000 euro from the National Lottery allowed ITM to convert BSL2 premises into an additional BSL3 + laboratory. In previous years, the National Lottery also contributed substantially to building our BSL3 laboratories and other infrastructure projects, such as the conversion of a 17th-century monastery into an international campus.

Biosecurity cabinets and a negative pressure room were installed to ensure safe handling of TB strains in the laboratory. In addition, the new facility is equipped with an autoclave, a device that sterilises liquids and instruments by steam. These safety measures protect the technicians and stop the spread of infectious TB samples outside the laboratory in case of an incident within the laboratory.

The new premises will also act as back-up allowing maintenance of present BSL3 laboratories and ensuring continuity for the analyses of bacteria, viruses and parasites. Flexibility in the laboratory capacity is also important for the ITM outbreak research team that was recently set up. This group of nine researchers specifically focuses on research during outbreaks.

"For more than 20 years, the National Lottery players have been supporting ITM. The realisation of this high-security laboratory allows ITM to remain a major global player in the field of infectious diseases. Such contributions can strengthen the social role of the National Lottery," says Frank Demeyere of the National Lottery.

[ITM is host to the world's largest public collection of tuberculosis \(TB\) strains](#), an important tool for research into new diagnostics and development of medicines. Every year the Institute investigates thousands of TB samples sent to Antwerp from all over the world for confirmation and extensive analyses. In total, more than 25 people work in the Unit of Mycobacteriology, which, besides TB also carries out research into leprosy and Buruli ulcer.