

THEME

Outbreak Research Team

The Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM) has a rich history of being involved in outbreak investigation, research and response. This stretches from our historical and continued involvement in outbreaks of Ebola and Marburg to more recent work related to cholera and antimicrobial resistance. In a highly interconnected world, it is vital that ITM continues to innovate and develop its outbreak research capacity.

The Outbreak Research Team (ORT) at ITM enhances understanding of what drives the transmission and spread of outbreak-prone diseases, designs and evaluates methods and models for early detection, as well as assesses different outbreak prevention and control intervention strategies. Working primarily in low-resource settings, the ORT has a mission to **'strengthen the evidence-base for improved outbreak preparedness, response, recovery and resilience through inter-disciplinary applied research'**.

The ORT is always on stand-by to do research interventions in outbreaks worldwide.

ORT members

Our eight-member team is composed of the following expertise and experience.

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Soledad Colombe (DVM, MPH, PhD) is an infectious disease epidemiologist with a veterinary background. She has worked as an epidemiologist researcher in the field of international health, with a strong interest in One Health. Prior to joining ITM, she completed the European Programme for Intervention Epidemiology Training (EPIET) at the Public Health Agency of Sweden.

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Birgit De Smet (MSc) is a biomedical scientist from the Unit of Tropical Laboratory Medicine at ITM. Since 2008 she has been involved in laboratory capacity building projects with ITM's partner institutes focusing on diagnosis of bacterial and viral infections.

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Sara Janssens (MA, MES) has a background in International Relations and European Studies. She has previously worked in South Africa for several years, where she gained work experience with project management and administration, data and knowledge sharing, and digitisation and change processes in the context of a capacity building project.

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Laurens Liesenborghs (MD, PhD, MMed) is a medical doctor, specialised in internal medicine and with an interest in emerging infectious diseases. He worked for MÃ©decins Sans FrontiÃ©res on a Lassa Fever project and has research experience in translational bacteriology and virology. Before joining ITM, he worked as researcher at the Rega Institute of the University of Leuven on developing treatments and vaccines against SARS-CoV-2, while conducting clinical trials with hospitalized COVID-19 patients.

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Joachim Mariën (MSc, PhD) is a disease ecologist whose work in the field has been concentrated in Tanzania and Guinea. He has concentrated most of his work on the transmission dynamics of rodent-borne parasites, including Lassa virus, and has a keen interest in zoology, molecular biology and mathematical modelling.

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Marie Meudec (MAs, PhD) is an anthropologist who studied in France and Canada. Before joining ITM, she worked as an expert for law firms (UK, Canada) and as a researcher on various topics (spiritual and healing practices, everyday ethics, stigma and resistance, health inequalities, racial profiling, among others), conducting ethnographic fieldwork in Haiti, Saint-Lucia and Canada. She has taught at Laval University, the University of Toronto and the State University of Haiti.

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Philippe Selhorst (MSc, PhD) is a medical virologist with an interest in infectious diseases and molecular epidemiology. He has broad experience in viral culture, next-generation sequencing technologies, and antiviral drug discovery and has successfully led research projects in South Africa focusing on HIV transmission, drug resistance and microbicides.

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Wim Van Bortel (MSc, PhD) is a medical entomologist with over 25 years of experience in research of vectors and vector-borne diseases. His research focuses on disentangling the role of arthropod vectors in transmission systems in order to improve vector-borne diseases prevention and control. His studies are primarily done in Africa, Southeast Asia and Belgium.

In addition to our core ORT members, additional ITM staff may serve as a resource pool to reinforce research activities during an outbreak.

ORT governance

ORT members are supported by the director of ITM, Dr. Marc-Alain Widdowson, who takes up the scientific guidance and coordination of ORT research activities.

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Dr Marc-Alain Widdowson graduated from the University of Cambridge in Biological Anthropology and Veterinary Medicine and completed a MSc in Communicable Disease Epidemiology at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. He is a seasoned infectious disease epidemiologist and has managed scientific projects throughout the world, with field experience living in Bolivia, Zimbabwe and the Netherlands. He has broad expertise in epidemiology of (re) emerging viruses, public health, laboratory science and One Health. The past 18 years, Marc-Alain Widdowson has worked for the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in Atlanta and Kenya.

Funding

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News



[28 Sep 20](#)

[ITM and Congolese partners join forces to prevent and combat emerging disease outbreaks](#)

[ITM is launching CREDO, a large-scale project.](#)

[Outbreak](#)



[27 Sep 18](#)

[Staying on the ALERRT](#)

[Being prepared for clinical research and data management during any epidemic](#)

[Outbreak](#)



[25 May 18](#)

[Institute of Tropical Medicine Antwerp sends experts to Ebola outbreak](#)

[On Saturday \(26 May\), ITM will send two researchers to Congo to assist its partners in the Ebola outbreak.](#)

[Ebola](#)



24 Apr 18

[Report from the field – cholera in the DRC](#)

[In March 2018, ITM sent epidemiologist Florian Vogt to support the response of the WHO to the ongoing cholera outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo](#)

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23 Apr 18

[ITM Outbreak research team prepares for next epidemic](#)

[With funding of the Flemish Ministry of Science, ITM will do research during outbreaks.](#)

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13 Mar 18

[Launch of a research network against epidemics in Africa](#)

[ITM is part of an international consortium preparing to fight 'Disease X'.](#)

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