

## Destination Guide for Belgium

### Overview

#### Destination Risk Levels

- Low Medical Risk for Belgium
- Low Travel Risk for Belgium

#### Standing Travel Advice

- Travel to Belgium can continue with standard security precautions.
- Take basic security precautions against petty and street crime.
- Strikes within the transport sector can disrupt travel. Stay abreast of planned industrial action and plan itineraries accordingly.
- Protests and demonstrations over various political and socio-economic issues are common but usually pass off peacefully. Plan journeys bypassing them as a precaution and to minimise travel delays.
- There is a credible threat of terrorism from a wide variety of actors. Exercise vigilance at notable targets, including migrant centres, religious sites, transport hubs and tourist attractions. Carry out a profile- and industry-specific risk assessment as required.
- Be alert to suspicious behaviour and report any suspect packages to the authorities.
- Security alerts or hoaxes can trigger the short-notice evacuation of transport hubs or public locations, which can cause disruption. Follow all directives issued by the authorities during any security operation and do not act on the basis of unverified information.

#### Active Alerts (1)

● Notice | Category

**Expect nationwide disruption, reconfirm flights on 14 October during unionised workers' strike**

12 October 2025 at 00:21

**Location :** Belgium

**Category :** Strike, Transport disruption, Protest/Rally

Expect nationwide disruption and reconfirm the status of flights on **14 October** due to a planned strike by multiple trade unions. All metro rail, tram and bus services are likely to be disrupted in urban centres as unions oppose government policies. Due to the action, the airport authorities have also cancelled all departing flights from the capital's Brussels International Airport ([BRU](#)), as well as a significant number of arriving flights. All flights at South Charleroi Airport ([CRL](#), Wallonia region) have also been cancelled. An associated demonstration in Brussels is due to begin from **10.45** (local time) at [Brussels-North railway station](#).

#### Advice :

- **We do not hold specific information on transport schedules.** Contact the relevant service provider to reconfirm schedules. In the event of cancellations, your travel agent will be able to assist with alternative arrangements.
- Expect increased demand for alternative forms of transport, such as taxis and ride-sharing services. Book transport in advance to minimise inconvenience.
- Where possible, plan journeys bypassing strike-related gatherings to minimise delays. Expect a heightened police presence around such events and follow all official directives.
- Monitor our Belgium alerts for updates.

## Destination Guide for Belgium

### Before You Travel

#### Visa Requirements

#### IMMIGRATION REQUIREMENTS AND PROCEDURES

##### British

Passport Required: Yes  
Visa Required: No  
Return Ticket Required: No

##### Australian

Passport Required: Yes  
Visa Required: No  
Return Ticket Required: Yes

##### Canadian

Passport Required: Yes  
Visa Required: No  
Return Ticket Required: Yes

##### USA

Passport Required: Yes  
Visa Required: No  
Return Ticket Required: Yes

#### Visas

Visas are not required by nationals referred to in the chart above for stays of up to three months within a six-month period. Nationals not referred to in the chart above should contact their embassy to check visa requirements. Foreign nationals should ensure that their passport has at least one blank page while applying for tourist visa and a letter of invitation stating the purpose of visit while seeking a business visa. Nationals staying for longer than three months may require a long-stay visa. Short-stay visas are valid for stays not exceeding 90 days. Additional visa-related information is available [here](#).

As per the EU, the Entry/Exit System (EES) will be implemented in October 2025 by European countries mentioned [here](#). It will replace the manual border checks by implementing an automated IT system for registering non-EU nationals (those who do not hold the nationality of any EU country or the nationality of Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway or Switzerland) who are holders of short-stay visas or travellers exempted from visas for 90 days in a 180-day period (Schengen visa exemption) each time they cross the external borders using the system.

Please note: For details on exemptions to EES registration, please visit the [official page](#).

As per the EU, starting in late 2026, nationals of [visa-exempt countries](#) will need to obtain an ETIAS (European Travel Information and Authorisation System) travel authorisation to visit any of the 30 European countries mentioned [here](#) or up to 90 days within any 180-day period.

The exact date of its implementation is yet to be announced. For updates on the ETIAS launch date and new requirements, check the [ETIAS news corner](#). ETIAS applications can be made via the official ETIAS website or the official ETIAS mobile app once it is operational. For information on travel documents required to apply for ETIAS and payment exemptions, visit [here](#). ETIAS travel authorisation is valid for three years or until the travel document you used in your application expires - whichever comes first. It is for short-term stays and allows business travellers and foreign nationals to stay up to 90 days within any 180-day period. Most applications will be processed within minutes. However, in some cases, it may take longer, ranging from four to 30 days.

If your application is rejected, the email will provide the reasons for this decision. It will also include information about how to appeal, details of the competent authority, as well as the relevant time limit to appeal. Applicants of rejected ETIAS can also apply for ETIAS travel authorisation with limited validity. More information about this is available [here](#).

#### Procedures

Business travellers should not encounter major delays, particularly when arriving from other EU member countries. Non-EU nationals staying in a private residence are required to register with local Commune authorities within three days of arrival.

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## Entry/Exit Requirements

### Entry/Exit requirements

Inbound business travellers must possess a return/onward ticket, proof of sufficient funds and the address of local residence. People entering or leaving the EU with 10,000 euros or more, or the equivalent in another currency, are required to make a declaration on arrival or departure. This declaration is neither applied to passengers who are in transit via the EU to a non-EU country, provided the journey started from a non-EU country, nor to those travelling within the EU. According to Belgian law, you must have identification with you at all times.

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## Cultural Tips

### CULTURAL ISSUES AND ETIQUETTE

#### General cultural tips

- Language can be a sensitive issue because the country is divided between French-speakers in the southern region of Wallonia and Dutch-speakers in the northern region of Flanders. Relatively few people in either region speak the other region's language, particularly in Wallonia. Business travellers should be aware that in Flanders, some people remain reluctant to speak French even though they are able to do so, and prefer to speak to foreign nationals in English rather than French.
  - Brussels is officially bilingual and many residents speak both languages. English is also widely understood within the Wallonian business community.
  - French and Dutch names for certain cities and towns can be different, for example Anvers/Antwerp and Malines/Mechelen.
  - It is mandatory by law to carry personal identification documents at all times.
  - Foreign nationals should be aware that wearing masks or covering their faces in public places is illegal and could lead to detention and/or a fine.
  - There are no legal restrictions for LGBTQ individuals. Societal attitudes towards the LGBTQ community are generally tolerant.
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## Getting There

### METHOD OF ARRIVAL

#### By air

The main airport used for international flights is the capital's Brussels Zaventem International Airport ([BRU](#)). Short-haul services also operate from other major European cities to airports in Antwerp ([ANR](#)), Brussels South Charleroi ([CRL](#)), Liège ([LGG](#)) and Ostend ([OST](#)).

Airlines have variable security standards. You may wish to consult the European Commission's [website](#) for a list of airlines banned within the EU and the US Federal Aviation Administration's [website](#) for a database of aviation accidents and statistics.

#### By land

Belgium shares borders with France, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. Efficient rail services operate between Brussels and major cities in all these countries. These include the high-speed [Thalys](#) service to France, Germany and the Netherlands, and [Eurostar](#) services to London (UK) via the Channel Tunnel and to Amsterdam (the Netherlands).

#### By sea

Regular ferries operated by Transeuropa Ferries are available from Ramsgate port (Kent county, UK) to Ostend (Flanders region).

### Procedures

Business travellers should not encounter major delays, particularly when arriving from other EU member countries. Non-EU nationals staying in a private residence are required to register with local Commune authorities within three days of arrival.

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## Getting Around

### BY AIR

Business travellers will find it more convenient to travel by train or car than by air. [Brussels Airlines](#) is the national carrier.

### BY ROAD

Driving is on the right. Foreign nationals can drive provided they have a valid national driver's licence. There should be no problem hiring a car and most cities provide car parks and street parking-meters. Hotels and limousine companies can arrange the hire of cars with drivers daily. Foreign nationals can hire cars from international car rental companies, such as [Avis](#), [Europcar](#) and [Sixt](#).

Highways are well maintained. However, secondary roads can be narrow and poorly lit. Potholes can be encountered, even on principal roads. The maximum speed limit on highways is 72 miles per hour (120kph). In urban areas, it is 30 miles per hour (50kph), while in main parts of Brussels, the limit is 18 miles per hour (30kph). Although these speed limits are imposed by the authorities with the help of speed traps and cameras, motorists frequently exceed the limits and often drive aggressively. Fines for violating the speed limit and drink-driving are severe. Business travellers can have their vehicles impounded if they are unable to pay on the spot.

Information concerning road navigability and transportation is easily available within the country.

Road signage is adequate. Roadside assistance is efficient and can be availed in English through [Touring Mobilis](#) (+32 2 286-3332) along with information on road conditions. Vehicles joining from the right are given priority, as are trams and buses over other traffic. Foreign nationals should carry a blank copy of the accident reporting form (CONSTAT) in case they become involved in an accident. The police must be informed of accidents and drivers should remain at the site until the police write their report. Vehicle-related crime, such as carjacking, is a serious problem in and around Brussels and in Charleroi (Hainaut province).

### BY TAXI

Foreign nationals should use registered taxis, which provide a safe way of travelling around. They are available at taxi stands in most towns and cities or can be booked by telephone. Smartphone taxi applications or ride-sharing services, like Uber, are a reasonably safe and reliable form of transport for business travellers in major cities in Belgium.

### BY TRAIN

The National Railway Company of Belgium (French: [SNCB](#), Dutch: NMBS) operates services throughout the country. Suburban commuter and intercity services are reliable, though railway workers stage occasional strikes during disputes with the management over pay and conditions. Members can use a rail pass for all destinations across the country. It can be purchased online or at the stations and is valid for one year.

### BY OTHER MEANS

Domestic bus services are operated by Société des Transports Intercommunaux de Bruxelles ([STIB](#), Brussels metropolitan area), Transport En Commun ([TEC](#), Wallonia region) and [De Lijn](#) (Flanders region). These have fixed timetables and operate between all the major cities. However, trains are usually a quicker and more efficient way of travelling around the country.

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## Business Women

### BUSINESSWOMEN

Women face no particular security concerns. Unwanted physical attention and verbal harassment are rare, though standard security precautions should be observed, particularly at night.

Belgian society is egalitarian, and women are unlikely to face any kind of discrimination in business and political circles on account of their gender.

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## Working Week

### WORKING WEEK

- Working week: Monday to Friday
  - Working hours: 08.30-17.30
  - Banking hours: 09.00-16.00
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## Language & Money

### LANGUAGE

Belgium has three official languages: French, Dutch (known in Flanders as Flemish) and German.

Brussels is officially bilingual, and many residents speak both languages. German is spoken by less than 1% of the population on the German border.

Few people in Flanders speak good French, even fewer Walloons speak Dutch, and using the other community's language is rarely fruitful. Many businesspeople and most government officials are also likely to speak English, particularly in Brussels and the larger towns of Flanders.

### MONEY

Belgium is a member of the European Economic and Monetary Union and its currency is the euro. Euro-denominated credit cards (Visa and MasterCard) are widely accepted in main hotels, shops and restaurants. Traveller's cheques are also often accepted. Smaller establishments may accept cash only. ATMs are widely available in major cities and accept cards linked to networks such as Cirrus and Plus. Some banks and exchange facilities are not equipped to identify counterfeit currency and as a result, they can refuse U.S. dollar denominations of \$50 and \$100.

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## Tipping

### TIPPING

Tipping is usually not required as service charges are usually included in the bill. However, porters, cloakroom and bathroom attendants are generally tipped.

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## Geography & Weather

### CLIMATE

#### Climate overview

- The climate is temperate, with mild winters, cool summers and significant precipitation throughout the year.
- Monitor the website of the [Royal Meteorological Institute](http://www.kmi.ac.be) for weather updates and warnings.

#### Flooding

- Floods are the most common natural hazard in the country.
- Coastal areas and some parts of Wallonia (Hainaut, Liege and Luxembourg provinces) situated next to main rivers are prone to flooding.
- Flooding can cause power and water outages and disruption to air, road and rail travel.

#### Heavy snowfall

- Heavy snowfall occurs occasionally during winters.

- Ice on roads can create dangerous driving conditions, while trains, including high-speed services, and flights can be cancelled.

#### Heatwaves

- Heatwaves affect the country between June and August.
- Disruption to rail services and power outages can occur during heatwaves.

#### GEOGRAPHY

The Kingdom of Belgium is a European country bordered by France, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. The landscape is varied. The rivers and gorges of the Ardennes contrast sharply with the rolling plains that make up much of the countryside. The major North Sea port of Antwerp lies on Belgium's coast and gives the country strategic importance to continental Europe. The low-lying areas on the Scheldt estuary are prone to flooding. The country is divided into three regions: the Dutch-speaking Flemish Region (Flanders), the French-dominated Walloon Region (Wallonia) and the Dutch- and French-speaking Brussels-Capital Region.

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#### International Dialing & Power

#### DIALLING CODES

Country Code : 32

IDD Prefix (International Direct Dialling) : 00

NDD Prefix (National Direct Dialling) : 0

#### COMMUNICATIONS

The telephone system and postal service are efficient. Local pay telephones take coins and phonecards, which can be purchased at any post office. Mobile coverage is generally good. Short-term mobile telephone rental is available for visiting foreign nationals but is generally significantly more expensive than using roaming services. Major mobile network providers include Mobistar, Proximus and BASE. All major hotels have internet access and fax facilities. Internet cafes are widely available.

#### ELECTRICITY



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#### Calendar

#### Holidays & Security Dates

##### 2025

**01 Nov** All Saints Day

##### 2026

**01 Jan** New Year's Day

In many countries, if this holiday falls on a Saturday or Sunday, a public holiday is declared for the following Monday.

**11 Jul** Local holiday - North

**15 Aug** Assumption of Mary

**27 Sep** French Community Day

French-speaking community only.



## Destination Guide for Belgium

### Medical Overview

## Medical Care

Excellent

### Standard of Health Care

There is a high standard of medical care in Belgium, and travellers should not encounter any difficulty with obtaining quality medical care. There are both private and public hospitals, and one's choice of hospital will depend upon the nature of the problem and where they are located. Medical facilities can be limited in rural areas.

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## Medical Contact

Emergency Numbers, hospital and clinic contact information

### EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Ambulance : 100/ 112

Fire service : 100/ 112

Police : 101/ 112

### Hospitals & Clinics

#### CHU Saint-Pierre

322 Rue Haute

32 25353111

[info@stpierre-bru.be](mailto:info@stpierre-bru.be)

#### Cliniques Universitaires Saint Luc

10 Hippocrate Avenue

32 27641111

[international@saintluc.uclouvain.be](mailto:international@saintluc.uclouvain.be)

#### Delta Hospital Chirec

201 Boulevard du Triomphe

32 24345558, 32 24348111

[patients.international@chirec.be](mailto:patients.international@chirec.be)

#### Europe Hospitals - St Elisabeth Site

206 Avenue de Frelaan

32 26142000

[info@euhos.be](mailto:info@euhos.be), [administrationpatients@cliniquesdeleurope.be](mailto:administrationpatients@cliniquesdeleurope.be)

#### University Ziekenhuis Antwerpen

655 Drie Eikenstraat

32 38213000

[medischeinformatie@uza.be](mailto:medischeinformatie@uza.be), [vragen@uza.be](mailto:vragen@uza.be)

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## Vaccinations

Routine only

## Hepatitis A

Many travel health professionals recommend hepatitis A vaccination for all travellers regardless of destination, especially those who are at higher risk (see [US CDC](#)), such as gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men, people who use illicit drugs or those with liver disease.

Hepatitis A is a viral disease that causes liver inflammation. The virus is present in the faeces of an infected person. It spreads through contaminated food and water and is common in areas with poor sanitation. Person-to-person spread also occurs, when the virus is inadvertently transferred into the mouth, including during sexual activity. People at higher risk of infection include men who have sex with men, illicit drug users and people with liver disease.

Not everyone gets symptoms. If symptoms do occur, they begin two to four weeks or more after infection and can last for weeks or months. Symptoms include fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, diarrhoea, nausea/vomiting, abdominal pain/discomfort, jaundice (yellow colour of the skin and eyes), dark urine, clay-coloured stool, joint pain and itching. Many infected people suffer only a mild illness. Most cases recover fully after four or more weeks. However, for some, the disease can be severe, and occasionally is fatal. There is no specific treatment and cases are managed through supportive therapy. Prevention is through vaccination, attention to hygiene, and access to safe food and water.

[Watch the Hepatitis Video Podcast](#) (Vimeo)

[View Viral Hepatitis Infographic Poster](#) (PDF)

### The Disease

*Hepatitis* is a general term that means inflammation of the liver. Medications, poisons, alcohol and infections can all cause hepatitis.

Hepatitis A is inflammation of the liver caused by a virus. The virus is highly contagious. People are mostly infected through eating or drinking contaminated food or water, or through direct contact with an infected person. Usually people make a full recovery, however occasionally the disease can be severe or fatal. There is an effective vaccine available.

### Transmission

The illness is transmitted via the "faecal-oral route". The virus is present in the stool of an infected person. Others are infected when they consume food / drink contaminated with the virus. This is more common in areas with poor sanitation systems and limited access to clean water.

It is also possible to get the disease via direct contact with an infected person's faecal matter, for example through incompletely washed hands, sexual contact or through shared illicit drugs.

### Symptoms

Not everyone gets symptoms. Most childhood infections will be asymptomatic or mild. Most adults will develop symptoms, and severity increases with age.

If symptoms do occur, they begin two to four or more weeks after infection and can last for weeks or months. They include any or all of the following:

- fever
- fatigue
- loss of appetite
- diarrhoea
- nausea/vomiting
- abdominal pain/discomfort
- jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes)
- dark urine, clay-coloured stool
- joint pain
- itching

Most people make a full recovery. About 10 to 15% of symptomatic persons with hepatitis A may experience relapse or prolonged illness up to six months. Sometimes the disease is severe and can be fatal (less than 1% of all cases), particularly in older people, and those with other underlying liver disease (such as infection with hepatitis B or C). It is thought to be due to the immune mechanisms rather than infection levels.

### Diagnosis

Blood tests are required to confirm the diagnosis.

### Treatment

There is no specific medication to treat hepatitis A. Medications to relieve symptoms should only be used under medical advice as they may contribute to damage of the liver.

## Prevention

Prevention is through **hygiene**, careful selection of **food and water**, and **vaccination**.

**Good hygiene, and choosing safe food and water** are important, especially in areas where hepatitis A is common:

- Maintain a high level of personal hygiene, including during sexual activity.
- Do not drink tap water. Choose boiled or bottled water from reputable sources, water that has been treated with chlorine or iodine, or carbonated beverages.
- Avoid ice, as it may have been made with unsafe water.
- Ask locally which restaurants and hotels serve safe food.
- Select food that has been thoroughly cooked while fresh and served very hot.
- Do not eat raw shellfish.

**Vaccination** is effective, widely available and generally recommended for any traveller who has not already had the vaccine (or the disease). Two doses, given six months apart, are required for lifelong immunity. All travellers should consider it, particularly:

- If travelling to areas with high rates of hepatitis A.
- When living conditions are crowded or have poor sanitation.
- Men who have sex with men.
- Illicit drug users.
- People with liver disease.

**Postexposure prophylaxis:** After exposure, people who are not immune may be recommended Hepatitis A vaccination or immune globulin (antibodies) as soon as possible (within two weeks) to prevent infection.

## Risk to travellers

Hepatitis A is common in areas with limited access to sanitation. People who live with an infected person, men who have sex with men, illicit drug users and people with liver disease are at higher risk in any area.

US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [Hepatitis A Information](#)

European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) [Factsheet about hepatitis A](#)

## Hepatitis B

Recommended for health care workers and anyone who may have a new sexual partner, share needles or get a tattoo or body piercing.

Many travel health professionals recommend hepatitis B vaccination for all travellers and international assignees, regardless of destination.

## The Disease

The hepatitis B virus, like HIV, is transmitted through contact with blood, blood products or body fluids. Modes of transmission include:

- Unprotected sexual intercourse
- Infected blood transfusions
- Needle sharing by IV drug users
- Use of unsterilized needles, syringes or equipment
- From mother to child during childbirth

Symptoms develop between 45 and 160 days after infection when the virus invades the liver causing fever, abdominal pain, nausea and loss of appetite. Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes) is a common feature and the urine may become dark. There is no specific treatment and recovery usually takes about four weeks. Many individuals may have no symptoms but can still be infectious to others.

Approximately 1 in 10 of those infected do not recover fully and suffer ongoing liver damage called chronic hepatitis B - this can eventually cause liver cirrhosis and/or cancer. The very young and the elderly are more likely to develop a chronic infection.

## Vaccination

In many countries, hepatitis B is included in the routine childhood immunizations and need not be repeated. For unvaccinated travelers:

### *Routine schedule*

- Individual hepatitis B vaccination requires a series of three injections given on days zero, 30 and after 6-12 months.
- A combined vaccine for hepatitis A and B is available in many countries. It also requires a series of three injections given on days zero, 30 and after six months.

### *Accelerated schedule*

Can be used for travelers who will depart before the first two doses of the routine schedule can be given:

- Use an *individual* hepatitis B vaccine
- Doses on days 0, 7 and 21
- Fourth dose required after 6 months

### *Accelerated combined hepatitis A and B vaccine*

- Doses on days 0, 7 and 21
- Fourth dose of hepatitis B alone or the combined vaccine required after 12 months

[Watch the Hepatitis Video Podcast](#) (Vimeo)

[View Viral Hepatitis Infographic Poster](#) (PDF)

### **The Disease**

Hepatitis B is a viral disease affecting the liver. It is transmitted through contact with blood, blood products or body fluids of an infected person. It can cause a mild illness but occasionally can develop into a chronic illness.

### **Transmission**

The hepatitis B virus, like HIV, is transmitted through contact with blood, blood products or body fluids (e.g. semen, saliva) on broken skin. Modes of transmission include:

- Unprotected sexual intercourse with an infected partner
- Infected blood transfusions
- Needle sharing by IV drug users
- Use of unsterilized needles, syringes or equipment
- From mother to child during childbirth
- Contact with wounds of an infected person

The virus remains viable outside the body on any surface for about seven days and can lead to infection. Blood spills including dried blood can be infectious.

### **Symptoms**

Symptoms develop between 30 and 180 days after exposure to infection. Hepatitis B can either be acute (short term illness) or chronic (long term illness). Most people will not develop symptoms during the acute phase. Others experience fever, pain in muscles and joints, abdominal, nausea and loss of appetite. Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes) is a common feature and the urine may become dark. Recovery may take several weeks.

Risk of chronic illness is related to age. Babies who get infected from their mothers or those that get infected before five years of age are very likely to develop chronic infection. Less than 5% of adults and about 90% of children may develop chronic infection. In chronic illness, virus continues to remain in the body although people do not have symptoms. Many individuals may appear healthy but can spread the infection to others. Life threatening conditions such as liver cirrhosis and/or cancer may develop.

### **Diagnosis**

The disease can be confirmed by blood tests.

### **Treatment**

There is no specific cure for the disease. Treatment is mainly supportive, consisting of rest, adequate nutrition and medications to reduce discomfort.

### **Prevention**

Avoid direct contact with body fluids.

**Vaccine:** This can prevent the illness and its serious outcomes such as cirrhosis and cancer. In many countries, hepatitis B vaccination is included in the routine childhood immunizations.

### **Risk to Travellers**

Most travellers are at low risk unless they have contact with the infected blood or body fluids.

[CDC Hepatitis B information](#)

## **Measles**

- Recommended for all travellers and international assignees.
- All travellers should be up to date with their measles vaccination (schedule differs by country). Vaccination for adults is available as MMR (measles, mumps and rubella), two doses given at least four weeks apart are required.

Some individuals [cannot be vaccinated](#) due to certain health conditions.

Measles is a highly contagious viral disease that can have serious complications.

### **Transmission**

Measles spreads very easily when an infected person talks, coughs, or sneezes, releasing droplets into the air. If a healthy person breathes in these droplets, they can get sick. The virus can stay in the air and infect people for up to 2 hours after the infected person has left. It can also land on objects and surfaces, where it can live for several hours. If you touch these surfaces and then touch your face, you can get infected.

A person with measles is infectious from four days before the appearance of the rash until four days after it has appeared. After being exposed to the virus, approximately 90% of people who are not immune will become infected.

**Symptoms**

Measles symptoms usually start 7-14 days after being exposed to the virus. Early signs include a high fever, cough, runny nose, and red, watery eyes. Small white spots, known as Koplik's spots, may appear inside the mouth. A few days later, a red, blotchy rash starts on the face and spreads to the rest of the body.

Measles can lead to serious complications, especially in young children, adults over 20, pregnant women, and people with weakened immune systems. Common complications include ear infections and diarrhea. More severe complications can be pneumonia, which is a lung infection, and encephalitis, which is swelling of the brain. These severe complications can sometimes be fatal.

Pregnant women who contract measles have an increased chance of miscarriage and pre-term delivery. Their babies may also experience low birth weights and birth defects.

**Diagnosis**

This illness is usually diagnosed clinically. If necessary, a lab test can confirm measles.

**Treatment**

There is no particular treatment for measles. Symptoms can be managed with over-the-counter preparations, good nutrition and adequate fluid intake. Antibiotics are required if there are bacterial complications (such as pneumonia, ear infection). Sick people should be isolated from non-immune people, and should not go out in public until at least four days after their rash appears.

**Prevention**

Measles can be effectively prevented by vaccination, which many countries routinely administer during childhood. The MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) vaccine is highly effective and safe, providing lifelong immunity for most people after two doses. Vaccination not only protects individuals but also helps prevent the spread of the virus within communities.

People who are not immune and are at higher risk for complications (such as pregnant women, unvaccinated infants and people with weakened immune systems) may be given a dose of antibodies if exposed to the virus.

In addition to vaccination, good hygiene practices, such as regular handwashing and avoiding close contact with infected individuals, can help reduce the risk of transmission.

**Risk to Travellers**

Measles occurs throughout the world. Outbreaks are common in areas where there is low vaccination coverage. Measles is highly contagious and can spread quickly in places where people gather, such as airports and tourist destinations. Anyone who has not been immunised, or has not previously had measles, is at risk of infection.

- International SOS article on [measles, mumps and rubella vaccination](#)
- [CDC Measles Information](#)
- See routine childhood vaccination schedules: [Australia](#), [Canada](#), [Europe](#), [USA](#), [UK](#)

**Tickborne encephalitis**

Recommended for:

- people who will spend time in forested or grassy areas during tick season (particularly those who will hike, camp, perform fieldwork, etc.);
- people residing in this country for longer periods (i.e., six months or more).

Tickborne encephalitis (TBE) is a viral infection which is mostly transmitted to people through tick bites. Ticks live in or near forests and are usually active during warmer months. TBE infection can also be acquired by consuming unpasteurized dairy products from infected cows, goats or sheep.

Most people will not have any symptoms. For those who do, initial symptoms include fever, headache, muscle aches, nausea, and fatigue. These may resolve in a week or so, but if the infection spreads to the brain, the symptoms may become more severe (decreased mental state, severe headaches, convulsions, weakness and/or coma). TBE can be fatal.

Prevention is through avoiding tick bites and vaccination.

**The Disease**

Tickborne encephalitis (TBE) is a viral infection which is mostly transmitted to people through tick bites. It occurs in many areas of Europe and Asia.

**Transmission**

These viruses are mainly transmitted to humans by the bite of an infected tick. Ticks are usually found in forests, long grass and hedges and are more active between early spring and late autumn. Often, the bite goes unnoticed. Infection can also be acquired by consuming unpasteurized dairy products from infected cows, goats or sheep.

**Symptoms**

Many people have no symptoms. If symptoms do develop, they first start about 7 to 14 days after the tick bite. Initially there may be fever, headache, muscle aches, nausea and fatigue. These symptoms usually resolve in a week or so, but up to one third of people go on to a second phase of illness with inflammation of the brain and spinal cord. Symptoms then include severe headaches, decreased mental state, convulsions, and muscle paralysis. Recovery takes months and there may be long-term brain and nervous system damage. TBE can be fatal.

**Diagnosis**

The disease can only be diagnosed through laboratory tests.

**Treatment**

There is no specific medication to treat TBE. Patients are managed with supportive treatment.

**Prevention**

Avoid tick bites:

- Wear long pants with tight cuffs, and tuck pant legs into socks.
- Use insect repellent containing DEET, picaridin, IR3535, Oil of Lemon Eucalyptus (OLE), para-menthane-diol (PMD), or 2-undecanone.
- Consider soaking or spraying clothes with the insecticide permethrin. (Do not apply permethrin directly to the skin.)
- Look for ticks on the body and clothing, and remove them promptly.

Do not consume unpasteurised dairy products.

**Vaccine**

A vaccine is available in many countries. It is recommended for people visiting endemic countries during the warmer months (early spring to late autumn) and participating in outdoor activities. In countries where the disease is endemic, the TBE vaccine is often included in routine immunisation schedules.

**Risk to Travellers**

Travellers at increased risk of exposure are those going to endemic countries and whose itineraries include outdoor recreational activities (e.g., camping, hiking) or working in forested areas (e.g., farming, field research) between early spring and late autumn.

**References**

[CDC Tickborne encephalitis information](#)

[European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control Tickborne encephalitis factsheet](#)

[UK TravelHealthPro Tick-borne encephalitis factsheet](#)

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**Routine Vaccinations****COVID-19**

All travelers should ensure they are up to date with COVID-19 vaccinations. Recommendations vary between countries.

**Influenza**

**Annual vaccination is recommended. Vaccination is especially important for people at higher risk of severe disease, including:**

- Young children
- Pregnant individuals
- People 65 years and older
- People with underlying health conditions

**Measles-Mumps-Rubella**

Vaccinations against measles, mumps, and rubella are routine in childhood, and are usually available as a combined vaccine "MMR".

Everyone should be immune to these diseases before travel.

There are outbreaks of measles in many locations.

If you are unsure of your immunity, consult your doctor well in advance of travel.

See routine childhood vaccination schedules: [Australia](#), [Canada](#), [Europe](#), [USA](#), [UK](#)

**Polio**

Vaccination against polio is routine in childhood in many countries. See routine childhood vaccination schedules: [Australia](#), [Canada](#), [Europe](#), [USA](#), [UK](#)

All adults should ensure they are immune to the disease before they travel abroad. If unsure of your immunity, consult your health professional. You may need a *primary vaccination* or a *booster*. Booster recommendations vary by country.

**Tetanus-Diphtheria-Pertussis**

Vaccinations against tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis are routine in childhood.

See routine childhood vaccination schedules: [Australia](#), [Canada](#), [Europe](#), [USA](#), [UK](#)

All adults should ensure they are immune to these diseases before they travel abroad. If unsure of your immunity, consult your health professional. You may need a *primary vaccination* or *booster*. Booster recommendations vary by country.

## Varicella

Varicella (chickenpox) vaccinations are included in the routine childhood immunization schedule of some countries. See routine childhood vaccination schedules: [Australia](#), [Canada](#), [Europe](#), [USA](#), [UK](#)

All adults should ensure they are immune to varicella before they travel abroad. If unsure of your immunity, consult your health professional.

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## Health Threats

Known health threats for this country

## Hantaviruses

Hantaviruses are a group of viruses that belong to the *bunyaviridae* family. They can cause two different types of illness in humans: Haemorrhagic Fever with Renal Syndrome (HFRS) involves the kidneys while Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS) involves the respiratory system. Regardless of which illness they cause, hantaviruses are carried by infected rodents. Virus is present in the animal's saliva, urine and faeces. Droplets of these excretions can contaminate the air in a process called aerosolisation. Humans become sick when they inhale the virus.

The incubation period of HPS is not positively known. Limited data suggests that people become sick within one to eight weeks after being exposed to the virus. The incubation period for HFRS is usually 1 to 2 weeks after exposure but could be as long as 8 weeks.

Initial symptoms of HPS include fatigue, fever, and muscle aches. About 50 percent of HPS patients also experience headache, dizziness, and abdominal symptoms (nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, pain). The "late stage" symptoms of HPS are cough/shortness of breath and a feeling of overall tightness in the chest. Heartbeat and breathing may both become rapid at this stage of illness. Symptoms of HFRS appear suddenly and include intense headaches, back and abdominal pain, fever, chills, nausea and blurred vision. As the disease progresses, patients may develop flushing of the face, inflammation, redness of the eyes or a rash. Later symptoms include bleeding from the skin, conjunctiva of the eye, and mouth. In the most severe cases renal failure develops.

There is no specific treatment or cure. Patients are treated supportively, meaning their symptoms are addressed even though the disease itself cannot be cured. Patients usually require hospitalisation in an intensive care unit. An antiviral medication, ribavirin, may be used to treat the HFRS although its effectiveness has not been proven in HPS.

There is no vaccine for HPS. Vaccines against HFRS are being used in many Asian countries. The best way to avoid infection is to eliminate rodents from your living space and worksite, and/or avoid contact with them. Keep food in tightly sealed containers, clean dishes immediately after use, do not leave pet food out all day, and seal holes to the outside – generally, make your environment inhospitable to rodents.

## Rabies

Rabies is a viral disease contracted when bitten or scratched by an infected (rabid) animal, often a dog. Once it enters the body, the virus travels along nerves and causes paralysis. As it reaches important organs like the spinal cord and the brain, it causes coma and death.

In countries where rabies is present in animals or bats, ALL animal / bat bites, scratches and licks to broken skin must be treated seriously. Rabies vaccination is very effective in preventing rabies, even after a bite/scratch by a rabid animal.

### Rabies vaccination

Pre-exposure vaccination is often recommended for expatriates and long-term visitors to destinations where rabies is present. It's especially recommended if quality medical care may not be available after being bitten or scratched by an animal. Pre-exposure treatment can be especially useful for children, since they may not tell their parents that they have been bitten/scratched.

Pre-exposure vaccination makes it easier to treat a bite or scratch. That's important because some types of rabies treatment can be in short supply in many countries, even in cities.

### If bitten, scratched or licked (on broken skin) by an animal:

- Immediately cleanse the wound with soap and water and a povidone-iodine solution if available.
- Seek medical advice from a qualified source or your assistance company.
- Notify local health authorities immediately. You may need *post-exposure vaccination*, even if you have had pre-exposure vaccination. (THIS CAN BE LIFE SAVING.)

## Lyme disease

Lyme disease occurs in North America, Europe and Asia. It is transmitted to humans by the bite of a particular species of tick. Lyme disease can cause an expanding rash at the site of the bite, fever, arthritis and nerve problems such as facial palsy.

To prevent tick bites:

- Avoid tick habitats
- Use insect repellents
- Check daily for ticks

Lyme disease vaccination is no longer available.

If you develop a rash at the site of a tick bite or other symptoms of Lyme disease, seek medical attention. A course of antibiotics can cure Lyme disease.

## Tickborne encephalitis

Tickborne encephalitis (TBE) is a viral infection which is mostly transmitted to people through tick bites. Ticks live in or near forests and are usually active during warmer months. TBE infection can also be acquired by consuming unpasteurized dairy products from infected cows, goats or sheep.

Most people will not have any symptoms. For those who do, initial symptoms include fever, headache, muscle aches, nausea, and fatigue. These may resolve in a week or so, but if the infection spreads to the brain, the symptoms may become more severe (decreased mental state, severe headaches, convulsions, weakness and/or coma). TBE can be fatal.

Prevention is through avoiding tick bites and vaccination.

## HIV, Hepatitis B and C, and STIs

HIV/AIDS, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C are spread by contact with bodily fluids (especially blood and semen).

- unprotected sex,
- needle sharing during IV drug use, or
- unsafe blood or medical/dental instruments.

Genital herpes (HSV), genital warts (HPV), gonorrhoea, chlamydia, syphilis and most other sexually transmitted diseases are spread by genital contact.

Prevention:

- In many countries, hepatitis B is now a routine childhood immunisation and need not be repeated. All non-immune travellers should consider vaccination.
- Always use new condoms (preferably brought from your home country).
- IV drug users should not share needles.
- Avoid having tattoos or piercings done.
- In healthcare settings, make sure that needles and syringes are sterile and not shared between patients.
- Call International SOS or your corporate medical department if you are hospitalised.
- Be aware of your risk when assisting anyone with an injury. Protect yourself from contact with bodily fluids.
- Seek medical attention within 24 hours if you accidentally come into contact with someone else's bodily fluids.

## Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is a viral disease that causes liver inflammation. The virus is present in the faeces of an infected person. It spreads through contaminated food and water and is common in areas with poor sanitation. Person-to-person spread also occurs, when the virus is inadvertently transferred into the mouth, including during sexual activity. People at higher risk of infection include men who have sex with men, illicit drug users and people with liver disease.

Not everyone gets symptoms. If symptoms do occur, they begin two to four weeks or more after infection and can last for weeks or months. Symptoms include fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, diarrhoea, nausea/vomiting, abdominal pain/discomfort, jaundice (yellow colour of the skin and eyes), dark urine, clay-coloured stool, joint pain and itching. Many infected people suffer only a mild illness. Most cases recover fully after four or more weeks. However, for some, the disease can be severe, and occasionally is fatal. There is no specific treatment and cases are managed through supportive therapy.

Prevention is through vaccination, attention to hygiene, and access to safe food and water.

## Hepatitis B

### The Disease

The hepatitis B virus, like HIV, is transmitted through contact with blood, blood products or body fluids. Modes of transmission include:

- Unprotected sexual intercourse
- Infected blood transfusions
- Needle sharing by IV drug users

- Use of unsterilized needles, syringes or equipment
- From mother to child during childbirth

Symptoms develop between 45 and 160 days after infection when the virus invades the liver causing fever, abdominal pain, nausea and loss of appetite. Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes) is a common feature and the urine may become dark. There is no specific treatment and recovery usually takes about four weeks. Many individuals may have no symptoms but can still be infectious to others.

Approximately 1 in 10 of those infected do not recover fully and suffer ongoing liver damage called chronic hepatitis B - this can eventually cause liver cirrhosis and/or cancer. The very young and the elderly are more likely to develop a chronic infection.

### **Vaccination**

In many countries, hepatitis B is included in the routine childhood immunizations and need not be repeated. For unvaccinated travelers:

#### *Routine schedule*

- Individual hepatitis B vaccination requires a series of three injections given on days zero, 30 and after 6-12 months.
- A combined vaccine for hepatitis A and B is available in many countries. It also requires a series of three injections given on days zero, 30 and after six months.

#### *Accelerated schedule*

Can be used for travelers who will depart before the first two doses of the routine schedule can be given:

- Use an *individual* hepatitis B vaccine
- Doses on days 0, 7 and 21
- Fourth dose required after 6 months

#### *Accelerated combined hepatitis A and B vaccine*

- Doses on days 0, 7 and 21
- Fourth dose of hepatitis B alone or the combined vaccine required after 12 months

### **Measles**

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#### **Food & Water**

Generally safe

#### **Food Risk**

Food hygiene standards are generally high.

#### **Water and Beverages**

Tap water is considered safe to drink.

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#### **Rabies**

Avoid bats.

#### **Rabies**

Rabies is present in bats only and the risk of exposure for average travellers is low.

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## Destination Guide for Belgium

### Security Overview

#### Personal Security

#### STANDING TRAVEL ADVICE

- Travel to Belgium can continue with standard security precautions.
- Take basic security precautions against petty and street crime.
- Strikes within the transport sector can disrupt travel. Stay abreast of planned industrial action and plan itineraries accordingly.
- Protests and demonstrations over various political and socio-economic issues are common but usually pass off peacefully. Plan journeys bypassing them as a precaution and to minimise travel delays.
- There is a credible threat of terrorism from a wide variety of actors. Exercise vigilance at notable targets, including migrant centres, religious sites, transport hubs and tourist attractions. Carry out a profile- and industry-specific risk assessment as required.
- Be alert to suspicious behaviour and report any suspect packages to the authorities.
- Security alerts or hoaxes can trigger the short-notice evacuation of transport hubs or public locations, which can cause disruption. Follow all directives issued by the authorities during any security operation and do not act on the basis of unverified information.

#### Crime

Limited to hot spots

#### CRIME

Although rates of violent crime are relatively low, petty street crime does pose a risk to people in urban centres, including Brussels and Antwerp (Antwerp province). Pickpocketing, mugging and snatch-and-run theft are commonly reported in crowded public transport hubs, notably the tram, metro and train stations. A common ploy is to divert a person's attention by asking for directions while an accomplice steals their luggage or other items. Thieves also operate near escalators, elevators or where there is a choke point in pedestrian traffic, obstructing movement while an accomplice commits the crime. Remain alert to your immediate surroundings, keep belongings within your line of sight and avoid displaying valuable items in public. Thefts from cars, even those waiting at traffic lights, are common, but basic precautions, including keeping windows closed, doors locked and concealing expensive items, can mitigate this risk. The theft of expensive makes and models of cars also remains a risk, including in carjackings.

Burglars target empty residences, particularly during the holiday periods in August, around Christmas and during winter holidays in February. Thieves conduct reconnaissance by posing as utility employees or charity workers to gain access to the residence. Do not allow entry to unknown individuals and always ask for identification. Effective security features, such as door chains and three-point locks, can also mitigate risks.

#### Terrorism

Limited indirect risk to foreign nationals

#### TERRORISM

Several terrorist incidents highlight the risk posed by Islamist militant groups and extremist-inspired attacks. However, the security forces' response and capabilities considerably mitigate such risks.

The most notable attack took place in March 2016, when the capital Brussels was targeted in a triple bombing. In total, 32 people were killed and 340 injured in the attack, which was claimed by the extremist Islamic State group. The scale of the incident, the use of complex explosives and the number of locations targeted pointed to a relatively significant degree of co-ordination and sophistication. Most recently, a gunman killed two Swedish nationals and injured another on 16 October 2023 in the capital Brussels. The perpetrator was suspected of having criminal and extremist affiliations.

Brussels is home to the EU and several other high-profile institutions, such as the NATO headquarters. These are attractive targets and so are transport infrastructure and crowded public areas. The security forces are visibly present at key locations (transport hubs, government buildings, tourist attractions, etc.) and also patrol the streets in urban centres. People may

encounter disruption caused by security operations, as well as false alarms resulting from security hoaxes or suspect packages.

## Social Unrest

### **SOCIAL UNREST**

Public sector workers occasionally stage protests over job cuts, pension reductions and the withdrawal of welfare benefits. Farmers, truck drivers, rail workers and taxi drivers have occasionally blocked major road routes in and around Brussels to protest against government policies. Such demonstrations can cause major travel disruption, but they generally remain peaceful. National strikes have led to disruption and are likely to occur in December before Christmas. Environmentalists, anti-capitalists and other activists stage occasional protests against EU policies outside EU institutions in central Brussels, particularly during EU summits. Such protests have occasionally resulted in arrests and clashes between activists and the riot police.

## Conflict

### **CONFLICT**

Belgium is involved in international military operations abroad, including in Mali, Congo (DRC) and the Middle East. However, the country does not face any serious external risks.