

INFECTIOUS DISEASES & TRAVEL

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

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Whether for work or vacation, millions of people travel every year. Because staying healthy is important no matter where you are, travelers should be aware of the risks of acquiring certain infectious diseases before, during and after their trip.

ARE TRAVELERS MORE SUSCEPTIBLE TO INFECTIOUS DISEASES?

Yes. When people travel, they may be exposed to diseases they are not exposed to at home. The level of risk depends on the purpose and length of the trip, the level of hygiene and sanitation at their destination, and the traveler's activities and surrounding environment during the trip.

WHAT ARE SOME COMMON INFECTIOUS DISEASES TRAVELERS MAY ENCOUNTER?

Depending on their destination, travelers may encounter infectious diseases such as malaria, influenza, dengue, rabies, hepatitis A or B, cholera, typhoid, yellow fever, Japanese encephalitis, meningococcus, or polio.



HOW CAN TRAVELERS AVOID CERTAIN UNUSUAL INFECTIONS?

Travelers can protect themselves in several ways. Vaccines are available for some diseases more commonly encountered during travel, such as yellow fever, Japanese encephalitis virus and typhoid. In addition, travelers should make sure they're up to date on routinely recommended vaccines before traveling, like measles, rubella, polio, tetanus and diphtheria. For some diseases, preventative medications — such as anti-malaria drugs prescribed prior to travel — can help decrease the risk of infection.

Travelers can also take precautions while traveling, such as sleeping in beds with mosquito nets; wearing sunscreen; drinking bottled water; making sure that foods are fully cooked; eating fruits that can be peeled; and using insect repellent that contains DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus (OLE) or PMD, or IR3535. Generally speaking, travelers should also practice good hygiene, such as washing their hands often and avoiding contact with animals.

WHAT VACCINES ARE COMMONLY RECOMMENDED FOR TRAVELERS?

Some vaccines may be *required* for travelers, while others are recommended. Travelers can check the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) country-by-country website to find out more about vaccine requirements and recommendations for their destination and for special circumstances (e.g., during pregnancy, studying abroad, etc.): wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/list.

For some destinations, vaccines, such as the yellow fever or COVID-19 vaccines, may be required for entry into the country. If a traveler does not have written proof of receiving the required vaccine, they will not be allowed to enter the country, may be quarantined for multiple days, or may be vaccinated upon entry.

In contrast, vaccines that are *recommended* to be up to date will not require proof of receipt to enter the country. However, because the risk of these diseases is increased when traveling abroad, travelers are safer if they receive recommended vaccines before traveling.

Travelers should consult with a travel medicine clinic well in advance of their trip to find out which vaccines are recommended or required for their situation.

WHERE CAN TRAVELERS FIND HEALTH ADVICE OR VACCINES IMPORTANT FOR THEIR TRIP?

Travel medicine specialists are the best source of information when preparing for a trip. Not only do they have up-to-date information about vaccine needs, they will also be able to provide travelers with other health-related information specific for their destination and planned activities. The International Society of Travel Medicine website has a clinic locator (based on country, state and city), so you can find a location near you: istm.org.

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WHAT ARE SOME PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR PEOPLE PREPARING TO TRAVEL?

Travelers should consider the following while preparing for their trip:

- Travel vaccines aren't typically covered by insurance.
- It's best to seek out a travel medicine specialist four to eight weeks before departing for an international trip. That's because some vaccines require more than one dose, and a traveler who needs vaccines may require a few appointments to complete the recommended doses.
- Proof of receipt of the yellow fever or COVID-19 vaccine may be required to enter some countries. While the COVID-19 vaccine is widely available, the yellow fever vaccine can only be given at certified yellow fever vaccination clinics.
- The CDC's travel health site (wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel) provides a wealth of information about staying healthy during travel. The site also contains destination-specific information.
- If traveling last minute, a visit to a travel clinic even one week before departure can still be beneficial, assuming they have an appointment available.

SHOULD PEOPLE WHO ARE IMMUNE COMPROMISED TAKE SPECIAL PRECAUTIONS?

Yes. People who are immune compromised need to consider a few variables before traveling. First, a traveler's ability to receive travel vaccines depends on the degree to which their immune system is compromised. Travelers who are not significantly immune compromised can safely receive travel vaccines. However, travelers who are significantly immune compromised often cannot receive travel vaccines or other prophylactic medicines necessary for their trip. In these circumstances, they may be recommended to change their itinerary, defer their trip, or alter activities at their destination to decrease their risk. Second, travelers who are immune compromised should consider whether their condition is stable or whether their current health may be destabilized by necessary disease prevention measures or health risks at their travel destination. Third, they should also consider whether their current therapies will interfere with the effectiveness or toxicity of travel vaccines or other prophylactic medicines necessary for the trip. All of these decisions should be made in consultation with their doctor. Finally, people with immune-compromising conditions are also recommended to avoid travel to areas where malaria and tuberculosis are circulating.

SHOULD PREGNANT WOMEN TAKE SPECIAL TRAVEL PRECAUTIONS?

Yes. Although most pregnant women can travel safely, it's important to take special precautions to ensure the safety of both the traveler and her baby. Pregnant women are not recommended to travel to areas where obstetric care may be limited. They are also advised to avoid travel to areas where malaria and yellow fever are common. If travel to these areas is unavoidable, pregnant women should visit a travel medicine specialist because some vaccines, such as the yellow fever vaccine, are not recommended during pregnancy. Prior to departing, pregnant women should visit their obstetrician and get a copy of their prenatal records, doctor's contact information, and a letter describing any medicines they are taking. Pregnant women should also have their doctor write a letter confirming their due date, pregnancy status and fitness to travel. During travel, a pregnant woman should avoid high altitudes and vigorous activity to which she is not accustomed. As is true for all travelers, pregnant women should follow safe food and water practices, such as avoiding salads, uncooked vegetables, tap water, and unpasteurized fruit juice and milk. Likewise, they should only eat fully cooked food that is served hot and fruits that have been thoroughly washed in clean water and peeled. Finally, they should wash their hands frequently with soap and water, avoid contact with animals, and use sunscreen and insect repellent.

ARE THERE SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR TRAVELING WITH INFANTS AND CHILDREN?

Parents traveling with infants and children should take precautions to protect them:

- *Breastfeeding infants* – Moms can continue breastfeeding throughout travel. In fact, breastfeeding is the best way to reduce an infant's risk of illnesses introduced through contaminated food or water.
- *Snacks for children* – Parents traveling with children are encouraged to bring a supply of snacks to ensure their children always have access to safe, clean food.
- *Car seats* – Because age-appropriate car seats are not always available in other countries, parents should take their child's car seat during travel.
- *Vaccines* – Depending on the destination and the age of the child, some vaccines may be necessary prior to departure. Infants and children should be up to date on routine vaccines prior to departure; however, if traveling internationally, some vaccines may be recommended at an earlier age. Check with the child's doctor or a travel medicine specialist who also sees children.
- *Bottles and pacifiers* – Because some infectious diseases are transmitted by contaminated water, parents should only wash their child's pacifiers and bottles with clean, disinfected water.



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