

Travel health - yellow fever vaccine

Yellow fever is a viral disease transmitted by mosquitoes in parts of Africa and South America. Vaccination is safe and effective and is a legal requirement for people travelling through infected areas. Avoiding mosquito bites is also recommended to reduce the risk of catching yellow fever or other mosquito-borne diseases.

The symptoms of yellow fever

The first symptoms of yellow fever appear three to six days after exposure to the virus. They include:

- Fever
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Flushed face
- Constipation
- Stomach ache
- Headache
- Muscle pain
- Restlessness and irritability.

Mild cases of yellow fever end with the above symptoms. In severe cases, there may be a remission from these symptoms for several hours or days. The fever then returns and the patient develops the classic symptoms of jaundice (yellow eyes and skin) and black, 'coffee-ground' vomit. This can be followed by coma and death within days.

Vaccination is a legal requirement

If you are travelling or passing through areas infected with yellow fever, some countries require you to be vaccinated. A record of your immunisation must be entered and validated in your *International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis*. While some countries have no entry requirements, others may require an *International Certificate of Vaccination* for all travellers. It is best to get the vaccination to ensure that you meet the varying entry requirements.

You should find out if the countries you intend to visit have requirements for yellow fever vaccination. Also speak to your doctor at least two months before you travel to arrange vaccinations. You must have the yellow fever vaccine at least 10 days before entering a country that requires you to have it, otherwise quarantine measures may be enforced.

Requirements and risks of vaccination

Yellow fever vaccine is safe and effective and lasts for 10 years. The vaccine, however, has some strict requirements. It should not be given to people who are:

- Allergic to eggs or neomycin.
- Immune-deficient.
- Pregnant.
- Under nine months of age - it should only be given to younger infants and pregnant women in unavoidable, high risk circumstances.

Reactions to the vaccine are generally mild and may include fever, headache and muscle ache which occur five to 14 days after immunisation. Serious side effects are rare, but any problems should be immediately referred to a doctor.

Avoid mosquito bites

Whether or not you need to be vaccinated, it is always a good idea when travelling to protect against mosquito bites and so reduce the risk of contracting a mosquito-borne illness. Some tips include:

- Wearing mosquito repellent that contains at least 30 per cent DEET
- Applying repellent, such as permethrin, to your clothes and bedding
- Wearing socks, long pants, and long-sleeve shirts when outdoors
- Using a bed net
- Staying in air conditioned, screened accommodation.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Travel Clinics Australia Tel. 1300 369 359 (for appointments)
- Travel Clinics Infoline Tel. 1900 969 359 (*calls charged at 99 cents per minute incl. GST - higher rates from mobiles & public phones*) or website
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Travel Advice Tel. 1300 139 281
- National Immunisation Infoline Tel. 1800 671 811

Things to remember

- Yellow fever is a viral disease spread by mosquitoes.
- Yellow fever can be fatal.
- Some countries require travellers to have an *International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis* to prove that they have had the yellow fever vaccine.
- Yellow fever vaccine is safe and effective for 10 years. There are some requirements for the vaccine.
- Travellers should always protect themselves against mosquito bites.
- Find out if the countries you intend to visit have requirements for yellow fever vaccination. You must have the vaccine at least 10 days before travelling.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Travel Clinics Australia

Copyright © 1999/2009 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.

- This Better Health Channel fact sheet has passed through a rigorous approval process. For the latest updates and more information visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au.