

Travel vaccinations

Anyone travelling overseas should visit their doctor or travel health clinic to find out what vaccinations they need. Even if you think your travel destination is safe, keep in mind that disease outbreaks can and do happen. Vaccination offers good protection against many diseases.

Vaccination for all travellers

The National Health and Medical Research Council recommends certain vaccinations as routine for all travellers. These include:

- Tetanus
- Diphtheria
- Pertussis (whooping cough)
- Varicella (chicken pox)
- Measles
- Mumps
- Rubella
- Polio.

The common diseases of childhood occur more frequently in developing countries, but they can also occur in adults in Western countries.

Vaccination for travellers with special needs

Some additional vaccinations are recommended for travellers who are at risk of infection or other health problems. This includes people with asthma, respiratory and cardiac conditions, metabolic conditions (such as diabetes) and anyone over 65 years of age. Vaccinations include:

- Influenza
- Pneumonia.

Vaccination for young travellers

Young people are also routinely offered vaccination against:

- Meningococcal C
- Hepatitis B
- Cervical cancer.

Vaccinations for travellers to high risk areas

Developing countries often have a higher risk of particular diseases. Your doctor will advise you of the immunisations you need, based on your travel plans. Vaccinations recommended for travellers to high risk areas include:

- Hepatitis A and B
- Typhoid
- Meningococcal meningitis
- Tuberculosis
- Rabies

- Japanese encephalitis
- Yellow fever.

Cholera vaccination is no longer recommended by the World Health Organization for any country.

Vaccination for specific diseases

Hepatitis A

- This is the most common vaccine-preventable disease in travelers.
- It is spread by contaminated food or water.
- The cause is a virus.
- Symptoms include fever, lack of energy (malaise) and jaundice (yellow skin colour).
- Hepatitis A is rarely fatal.
- Symptomatic treatment is the only treatment available.
- Vaccination is safe and extremely effective.

Hepatitis B

- This is spread by body fluid – commonly through sexual intercourse or shared syringes, but also by accident.
- The cause is a virus.
- Symptoms include fever, lack of energy (malaise) and jaundice (yellow skin colour).
- Around half of all cases worldwide result in death.
- Vaccination is safe and extremely effective.

Typhoid

- This is common in developing countries.
- The cause is a bacterium.
- Symptoms include fever, weakness, headache and sometimes a rash.
- Typhoid can be treated successfully with antibiotics.
- Vaccinations must be completed at least one week before travelling.

Rabies

- This is common to North, Central and South America, Europe, Africa and Asia.
- The cause is a virus passed on by a bite or scratch from an infected dog or any mammal that carries the virus.
- Symptoms include headache and fever, then convulsions and death.
- A three-dose vaccination is given over 3–4 weeks prior to travel.
- All animal bites and scratches should be immediately and thoroughly washed with soap and water for at least 10 minutes.
- Treatment after a bite from a possibly rabid animal involves a course of five vaccines and, if previously unvaccinated, an injection of immunoglobulin.

Meningococcal meningitis

- This is common in sub-Saharan Africa.
- The cause is a virus spread by aerosol droplets.
- Symptoms include headache, fever, confusion and neurological damage.
- Treatment can only ease the symptoms.
- Vaccination is a legal requirement for some countries.

Tuberculosis

- This is common in developing countries.
- The cause is a bacterium spread by aerosol droplets.
- Symptoms include persistent cough and fever.
- Treatment involves a prolonged course of antibiotics.

- Vaccination is recommended only for some travellers to high risk areas for prolonged periods and must be preceded by a special skin (Mantoux) test.

Japanese encephalitis

- This is present throughout greater Asia.
- The cause is a virus spread by infected mosquitoes.
- Symptoms include headache, fever, confusion and neurological damage.
- Treatment can only ease the symptoms.
- Three doses of vaccine are required well before you travel.

Yellow fever

- This is present in tropical South America and sub-Saharan Africa.
- The cause is a virus spread by infected mosquitoes.
- Symptoms include fever, headache, bloody vomiting, jaundice and death.
- The vaccination gives immunity for around 10 years.
- Vaccination is a legal requirement for some countries and certification can only be given by an authorised travel health clinic.

Infectious diseases for which there are no vaccines

Infectious diseases are generally transmitted by food, water or a lack of personal hygiene (for example, 'gastro', traveller's diarrhoea, giardiasis and amoebic dysentery) or by insects (for example, malaria and dengue fever). They can be life threatening. Your doctor will advise you on measures and medications that should be taken to help prevent these diseases.

Immunisation and HALO

The immunisations you may need are decided by your health, age, lifestyle and occupation. Together, these factors are referred to as HALO.

HALO is defined as:

- **Health** – some health conditions or factors may make you more vulnerable to vaccine-preventable diseases. For example, premature birth, asthma, diabetes, heart, lung, spleen or kidney conditions, Down syndrome and HIV will mean you may benefit from additional or more frequent immunisations.
- **Age** – at different ages you need protection from different vaccine-preventable diseases. Australia's National Immunisation Program sets out recommended immunisations for babies, children, older people and other people at risk, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Most recommended vaccines are available at no cost to these groups.
- **Lifestyle** – lifestyle choices can have an impact on your immunisation needs. Travelling overseas to certain locations, planning a family, sexual activity, smoking, and playing contact sport that may expose you directly to someone else's blood, will mean you may benefit from additional or more frequent immunisations.
- **Occupation** – you are likely to require additional or more frequent immunisations if you work in an occupation that exposes you to vaccine-preventable diseases or puts you into contact with people who are more susceptible to problems from vaccine-preventable diseases such as babies or young children, pregnant women, the elderly, and people with chronic or acute health conditions. Workers in aged care, childcare, healthcare, emergency service or sewerage repair and maintenance need to discuss their immunisation needs with their doctor. Some employers help with the cost of relevant vaccinations for their employees.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Travel Clinics Australia Tel. 1300 369 359 – for before and after travel advice from a travel clinic doctor
- Travel Clinics Infoline Tel. 1900 969 359 – calls cost 99c per min and are not available from all mobile and public phones www.travelclinic.com.au

- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Travel Advice Tel. 1300 139 281
- Travel vaccinations
- National Immunisation Infoline Tel. 1800 671 811

Things to remember

- Find out from your doctor or travel health clinic what vaccinations you need.
- Most illnesses can be prevented with vaccinations and a little caution.

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

Travel Clinics Australia

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