

Travel immunisation

Some illnesses you can catch overseas can be prevented with immunisation. 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.

Anyone planning to travel should check with their doctor, the World Health Organization (WHO) and Immunise Australia for the latest information on international infection outbreaks and available vaccines. In addition to immunisations against new infectious diseases, you might need booster doses of vaccines that you have received before.

There is no set immunisation schedule that will suit all travellers, so you must see a doctor. It is important that you don't wait until the last minute to visit your doctor to discuss the immunisation needs for your trip. You might need a number of doses and you might need time after immunisation for your body to develop full immunity.

Immunisation for travellers

The WHO recommends that all travellers be up-to-date with routine vaccinations. In Australia, this refers to vaccinations available through the Immunise Australia Program. Additional immunisations might be required for people with specific needs or for people travelling to certain areas with a high risk of specific infectious diseases.

Routine immunisations

You should check whether you (and your children) are up-to-date with or need routine immunisations for diseases including:

- tetanus
- diphtheria
- pertussis (whooping cough)
- hepatitis B
- *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib)
- human papillomavirus (HPV)
- influenza (flu)
- varicella (chicken pox)
- measles
- mumps
- rubella
- pneumococcal disease
- rotavirus
- polio.

The common diseases of childhood occur more frequently in countries without widespread immunisation programs, but they can also occur in countries that do have immunisation programs. If you are travelling with children, it is important that you speak with your doctor about the risks.

Some of these routine immunisations, such as for flu, are important for people with medical conditions such as asthma, respiratory and cardiac conditions, metabolic conditions (such as diabetes) or anyone over 65 years of age.

Selective immunisation for travellers

For travellers to areas with a high risk of specific infections, speak with your doctor about immunisations that you might need for diseases including:

- cholera
- hepatitis A
- Japanese encephalitis
- meningococcal C
- rabies
- tick-borne encephalitis
- typhoid fever
- tuberculosis
- yellow fever.

Proof of immunisation

Some countries require proof of immunisation for some infectious diseases before you enter. Check with your doctor.

Diseases that might require proof of immunisation include:

- yellow fever
- meningococcal disease – specifically immunisation against serogroups A, C, W and Y
- polio – required by Saudi Arabia for some people.

Immunisation for specific diseases

Listed below is a brief overview about some infectious diseases, but you should check for more detailed information and speak with your doctor about your travel immunisation needs.

Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is the most common vaccine-preventable disease in travellers. Information for hepatitis A includes:

- It is spread by contact with contaminated food or water.
- Hepatitis A is caused by a virus.
- Symptoms include fever, lack of energy (malaise) and jaundice (yellow skin colour).
- Hepatitis A is rarely fatal.
- Treatment for the symptoms is the only treatment available.
- Immunisation is safe and extremely effective.

Hepatitis B

Information for hepatitis B includes:

- Hepatitis B 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.
- Immunisation is safe and extremely effective.

Typhoid

Typhoid is common in developing countries. Information for typhoid includes:

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

Rabies

Rabies is common to Central and South America, Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia. Information for rabies includes:

- 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 (fits) and death.
- All animal bites and scratches should be immediately and thoroughly washed with soap and water for at least 10 minutes.
- A three-dose immunisation is given over three to four weeks before travel.
- 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

Meningococcal meningitis is common in sub-Saharan Africa. Information for meningococcal meningitis includes:

- The cause is a virus spread by close contact with infected secretions from the nose and throat.
- Symptoms include headache, fever, confusion and a stiff neck.
- Treatment can only ease the symptoms.
- Immunisation is a legal requirement for some countries.

Tuberculosis

Tuberculosis is common in developing countries. Information for tuberculosis includes:

- The cause is a bacterium spread by aerosol droplets when someone with 'active' tuberculosis sings, laughs or sneezes.
- Symptoms include persistent cough and fever.
- Treatment involves a prolonged course of antibiotics.
- Immunisation is recommended only for some travellers to high-risk areas for prolonged periods and must be preceded by a skin (Mantoux) test.

Japanese encephalitis

Japanese encephalitis is present throughout Asia (and in the Torres Strait region of Australia). Information for Japanese encephalitis includes:

- The cause is a virus spread from animals to humans by infected mosquitoes.
- Symptoms include headache, fever, confusion and nervous system problems.
- Treatment can only ease the symptoms.
- Three doses of vaccine are required so speak to your doctor about when to begin immunisations.

Yellow fever

Yellow fever is present in tropical South America and sub-Saharan Africa. Information for yellow fever includes:

- The cause is a virus spread by infected mosquitoes.
- Symptoms include fever, headache, bloody vomiting, jaundice and death.
- The vaccine gives immunity for around 10 years.
- Immunisation 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 hygiene (for example, 'gastro', traveller's diarrhoea, giardiasis and amoebic dysentery) or by insects (for example, malaria and dengue fever). These diseases can be life threatening. Your doctor will advise you on measures and medications that you can take 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.

Talk to your doctor or immunisation provider if you think you or someone in your care has health, age, lifestyle or occupation factors that could mean immunisation is necessary. You can check your immunisation HALO using the downloadable poster.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Your local pharmacist
- In an emergency, always call triple zero (000)
- NURSE-ON-CALL Tel. 1300 60 60 24 – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- Immunisation Program, Department of Health, Victorian Government Tel. 1300 882 008
- Immunise Australia Information Line Tel. 1800 671 811
- Smartraveller.gov.au, Australian Government Tel. 1300 555 135 (from within Australia) or +61 2 6261 3305 (from overseas)
- Travel Clinics Australia Tel. 1300 369 359 (for appointments) – for advice before and after travel from a travel clinic doctor
- SAEFVIC Tel. 1300 882 924 – the line is attended between 9 am and 4 pm and you can leave a message at all other times

Things to remember

- Find out from your doctor or travel health clinic which vaccinations you need for your specific travel arrangements.
- The World Health Organization recommends some routine vaccinations for all travellers as well as specific vaccinations for travellers to regions with a high risk of specific diseases.
- For some infectious diseases, some countries require proof of immunisation to enter the country.
- Many 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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