

Travelling to Africa?



**A guide on how
to stay healthy
whilst on holiday**

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Note: this booklet gives guidance only. It is not a complete and authoritative statement of the law.

SECTION 1: PLANNING YOUR TRIP



You can have a healthy holiday and still enjoy it. This booklet is designed to help you be aware of possible “risks” and how to minimise these.

In this section: planning ahead, information about health insurance and some general advice on staying healthy while you’re away.

Staying safe and healthy abroad

Every year, people living in the UK go on more than 60 million trips abroad. Most of them have safe trips, but some get ill or have an accident and need medical treatment while they’re away.

Planning for your trip

Talk to your GP, practice nurse or travel health clinic about immunisations at least two months before travelling. You can also find out more information by visiting the immunisation website (www.immunisation.nhs.uk) and the National Travel Health Network and Centre website (www.nathnac.org).

Before your trip, look at the potential health risks for the country you’re going to. These will vary depending on what parts of the country you’ll be going to, the time of the year, and what kind of accommodation you’ll be staying in. For up-to-date information, visit www.fco.gov.uk.

Where to go for advice

Your doctor can give you advice and arrange any immunisations and anti-malaria medication you need, or you can go to a specialist travel clinic. Either way, try to go at least two months before your trip - you might not be able to get all the immunisations you need in one go, and some take a while to become fully effective. You may also need to start taking anti-malaria medication before you leave. If you’re leaving in less than two months, it’s still worth getting some medical advice: some protection is better than none. Tell the doctor or nurse where you’re going, if you’re pregnant (or thinking about getting pregnant) and whether you’re taking children with you.

You can get some anti-malaria medication from pharmacies without a prescription, so ask the doctor or nurse about the cheapest way to get what you need.

Immunisations

Make sure you've got all the immunisations you need for the country you're going to by checking

www.immunisations.nhs.uk or asking your GP. If you haven't had diphtheria, polio or tetanus vaccines before, this is an ideal opportunity to get them. Even if you have had them before, you might need a booster dose. Some immunisations are available free for travellers under NHS.

There may be a charge for other immunisations. Doctors can also charge you for signing or filling in a certificate.

Contraception

Make sure you have access to your preferred method of contraception while travelling. Talk to your GP or local contraception service before you go. Your local GP can supply you with condoms.

Prescription medicines

If you are taking prescription medicines, ask your doctor whether you'll be able to get them while you're away. If you can't, and the doctor can't prescribe enough for the whole trip, you'll have to pay for the medicines yourself at a pharmacy. You'll also need to find out if there are any restrictions on taking your medicines in and out of the UK or the country you are visiting - some medicines available over the counter in the UK may be controlled in other countries, and vice versa. Ask the relevant embassy or high commission, contact the **Home Office Drugs Branch on 020 7035 0472** or go to the Home Office website at **www.homeoffice.gov.uk/drugs**. You might need a letter from your doctor or a personal health record card giving details about the medicine. Always carry your medicines in a correctly labelled container. If you're given any medicines while you're away, try to find out if it's legal to bring them back into the UK. If you're in any doubt, declare them at Customs when you come back.

Existing medical conditions

Take a written record of any medical conditions you have, such as angina pectoris, diabetes and haemophilia, and the proper names - not just the trade names - of any medication you are taking. Keep the record with you.

Don't forget the dentist

If you think your teeth might need some attention, or it's been a while since you've had a check-up, try to go to the dentist before your trip (especially if you're going away for a long time). It can be difficult and expensive to get dental treatment when you're away.

First-aid and travel kits

A basic first-aid kit, with some plasters, insect repellent, antiseptic cream and water sterilisation tablets, won't take up much space and could be extremely useful. Depending on where you're going, you might also want to take an emergency medical travel kit with you. You can buy them in lots of places, including pharmacies and specialist travel clinics. The kit contains sterilised medical equipment, such as syringes, needles and suture materials. Ask the doctor or nurse to use them if you need treatment and are worried about hygiene. If you are going to a remote area, you could also think about taking a intravenous giving set (a set / kit for administering an intravenous drip) and blood substitute solution; ask your doctor for advice. Emergency medical travel kits should be clearly identified, otherwise you might have trouble getting them through Customs. Don't carry loose syringes or needles without a letter from your doctor to explain what they are for.

Reducing the risk of DVT

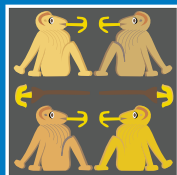
Deep vein thrombosis, or DVT, is the formation of a blood clot in one of the body's deep veins (usually in the leg). DVT is rare, but sitting still for long periods of time in a plane, train or car can increase the risk. Do some simple exercises - rotate your ankles and wiggle your toes - and get up and walk around if you can. Stay hydrated with regular non-alcoholic drinks. If you have ever had DVT or clots in your lungs, have a family history of clotting conditions, have had a major surgery

(especially a hip or knee replacement) in the last three months, suffer from heart disease, cancer or have ever had a stroke, you may be at increased risk.

Health insurance

Making sure you've got adequate health insurance is essential. Even if you are going to a country that has a reciprocal healthcare agreement with the UK, you may still need to pay for medical treatment. Please note none of the healthcare agreements cover the cost of bringing a person back to the UK in the event of illness or death. You must always tell your insurer if you have a pre-existing condition. Otherwise, you may not be covered.

Section 2: Essential Information on major diseases



In this section: how to protect yourself from malaria, HIV and AIDS, rabies, and hepatitis by planning ahead and taking some simple precautions while you're away.

Malaria

Malaria is spread by the bites of infected mosquitoes. The symptoms include fever and, in some cases, complications affecting the kidneys, liver, brain and blood. Malaria can be fatal. People who spend a lot of time in malarial areas can develop some immunity, but this does not last long. If you are travelling - or going back - to a malarial region, you should take anti-malarial medication.

Precautions

Try to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes. You should:

- wear clothes that cover your arms and legs;
- use insect repellent;
- sleep in a screened room, or under a mosquito net; and
- kill any mosquitoes in the room with a 'knockdown' spray.

If you develop a fever or feel ill while you're abroad or for up to three months after you get back, see a doctor immediately. Tell them if you've been to a country where malaria is present.

Planning ahead

Get advice from your doctor or a specialist travel clinic. If you have to take medication, follow the instructions carefully and remember you might need to start taking medication some time before your trip.

HIV and AIDS

AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is caused by the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). There is no vaccine or cure for HIV infection.

Precautions

- HIV is more widespread in many other countries than it is in the UK, and affects different groups of people. If you have sex with a new partner - always use a condom. Beware that many sexual health products, including condoms, are not as readily available abroad as they are in UK and quality may differ. It is a good idea to take some with you to protect yourself from HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. You can get condoms from your local health centre, family planning and GP clinics.
- Don't inject non-prescribed drugs. If you do, never share equipment.
- Don't have a tattoo, piercing, acupuncture or electrolysis unless you're sure the equipment is sterile.
- Try to make sure any medical treatment you have is absolutely necessary.
- Make sure any medical equipment used is freshly sterilised or is taken from a sealed pack. If you are going to an area where sterile equipment might not be available, think about taking some with you.
- If you have to have a blood transfusion, ask for screened blood.

For more information on HIV and AIDS please log on to:
www.steps2health.org.uk

Rabies

Rabies is an acute viral infection of the nervous system. You can get it if you are bitten by an infected animal. The symptoms include delirium and painful muscle spasms in the throat. Once the symptoms appear, rabies is usually fatal. If you do get bitten, you must get treatment as soon as possible to stop the disease developing.

Precautions

Don't touch any animal, even if they seem to be tame. If you do get bitten:

- wash the wound immediately, using soap or detergent if you can. Apply alcohol if possible;
- get medical attention - fast. Go to the nearest doctor or hospital. If you need a rabies vaccination, they will need to give it to you straight away. Ask for 'human diploid cell vaccine', if possible. If you have problems, contact the nearest British Consular official;
- make a note of when and where the incident happened, what the animal looked like, and whether it was wild or stray;
- if the animal belongs to someone, try to find the owner as soon as you can. Ask them to keep an eye on the animal for two weeks and tell you if it gets ill or dies. Ask them if the animal has had the rabies vaccine. If it has, ask to see the certificate. Remember, even if the animal has been vaccinated, you could still be at risk;
- tell the local police; and
- see your doctor as soon as you get back to the UK.

Planning ahead

Unless you're likely to be exposed to a high risk of infection, or are going on a long journey in a remote area, it's unlikely that your doctor will recommend having a rabies vaccination before you go. Even if you do, you'll still need urgent treatment if you get bitten by an infected animal.

Keep the UK rabies-free

The UK is currently free from animal rabies. To help keep it that way, you must not bring animals into the country without a licence. There are severe penalties for doing this.

Hepatitis

Viral hepatitis is a liver infection that can cause jaundice. There are several forms of the disease, including hepatitis A (sometimes called infectious hepatitis), hepatitis B and hepatitis C.

Hepatitis A

Most people catch hepatitis A abroad by consuming contaminated food or water. It can also spread from person to person, since the virus is present in faeces. If you are travelling to places where sanitation is basic, you need to be specially aware of the risk of infection. Take care over what you eat and drink, and wash your hands after going to the lavatory and before handling food. There is a vaccine against hepatitis A.

Hepatitis B

This occurs worldwide and is spread in the same ways as HIV, which is through:

- intimate person-to-person contact;
- sharing contaminated needles or syringes;
- transfusion of contaminated blood; or
- the use of inadequately sterilised equipment in medical treatment, tattooing, piercing, acupuncture or electrolysis.

There is a vaccine, which gives good protection against the disease. The best way to prevent infection is to avoid the high-risk activities listed above and to take a travel kit for use in medical emergencies.

Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C is more common in many other countries than it is in the UK. It is spread in the same way as HIV and hepatitis B. There is no vaccine. The best way to avoid infection is to take the precautions recommended against HIV and hepatitis B.

SECTION 3: WHILE YOU ARE AWAY



In this section: some simple steps you can take to reduce the risk of getting ill or having an accident while you're away.

Food and drink

Lots of travellers get diarrhoea from eating or drinking something contaminated. You can also get diseases like cholera, typhoid and hepatitis A from contaminated food and water. You can reduce the risk by taking these simple precautions:

- Always wash your hands after going to the toilet and before handling food or eating.
- If you're not sure whether the water is safe, sterilise it by boiling it or using purification tablets, or use bottled water (preferably fizzy) instead. Always use clean water for washing food and cleaning your teeth as well as drinking.
- Avoid ice unless you're sure it's made from treated, chlorinated water. This includes ice used to keep food cool as well as ice in drinks.
- Make sure food has been freshly and thoroughly cooked and is still piping hot - avoid food that has been kept warm.
- Avoid uncooked food, unless you can peel or shell it yourself.
- Avoid food that is likely to have been exposed to flies.
- Avoid - or boil - unpasteurised milk.

In addition, fish and shellfish can be suspect in some countries. Uncooked shellfish, such as oysters, are especially risky.

While you're on holiday, try to eat a healthy balanced diet. A healthy diet contains lots of fruit and vegetables; is based on starchy foods such as wholegrain bread, pasta and rice; and is low in fat (specially saturated fat), salt and sugar.

Taking care in the sun

As well as giving you sunburn, too much sun can age your skin and increase your risk of getting skin cancer. Remember, the sun is extremely strong in many holiday destinations - don't underestimate its power. Protect your eyes by wearing sunglasses with proper UV filters, and follow the SunSmart code, as recommended by Cancer Research UK:

Stay in the shade between 11am and 3pm

Make sure you never burn

Always cover up

Remember to take extra care with children

Then use factor 15+ sunscreen

Babies should never be exposed to direct sunlight.

- Another risk is heatstroke or sunstroke. Don't do anything too energetic during the hottest part of the day (usually between 11am and 3pm) and make sure you keep yourself hydrated by drinking lots of non-alcoholic liquids.

Swimming

Never go swimming alone. Adults should keep an eye on each other, and children must always be supervised by an adult who can swim well. Young children should never be left alone near water, even a paddling pool. Remember, the water in swimming pools, lakes, rivers and the sea could be contaminated, so try not to swallow any while you're swimming. If you are diving into water, make sure it's deep enough. Each year, many people are permanently paralysed as a result of injuries sustained from diving into shallow water.

Driving abroad

If you're planning to drive, make sure your insurance covers you for medical or hospital expenses in case you have an accident. Talk to your insurance company or a motoring organisation (such as the AA or RAC) before you leave to make sure you're fully covered.

Insect and animal bites

Use an insect repellent, and keep your arms and legs covered if there's a chance of being bitten. Remember, you can catch tick-borne diseases in cooler countries, not just in the tropics. Animal bites can lead to serious - and even fatal - infections. Keep away from animals. even if they seem tame.

SECTION 4:

WHEN YOU GET BACK

In this section: some general advice on what to do when you get home

- If you took anti-malaria medication while you were away, check to see if you need to carry on taking it after you get back. You need to take some types for up to a month after returning to the UK.
- If you had diarrhoea while you were away or shortly afterwards, and your work involves handling food, tell your employer as soon as possible.
- If you get ill after you get back, go to the doctor straight away and tell them which countries you've visited or travelled through.
- If you were bitten by an animal while you were away, go to your doctor. You should do this even if you had treatment abroad and are feeling well.
- If you are giving blood, tell staff if you've been travelling outside Europe or if you've had any medical treatment outside the UK.
- If you had unprotected sex (sex without a condom) whilst you were away - you may have risked catching HIV or Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI's). Visit your GP or GU Clinic for a check up. Remember some STI's and early HIV infection may be without symptoms. For more information on HIV and AIDS please log on to www.steps2health.org.uk

Useful Telephone Numbers



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