

Travel Vaccines: What You Need to Know Before You Go

Do your summer vacation plans include international travel? A case of wanderlust is one thing, getting sick overseas is something else.

In 2018, worldwide international tourist arrivals reached 1.4 billion. As globetrotting grows, travel medicine becomes an essential part of trip planning, especially as more of us visit formerly remote destinations.

"Americans have little defense against diseases that are common in developing countries. Academicians in particular tend to travel widely and to exotic places," says Dr. Gordon Dickinson, an infectious disease specialist with the University of Miami Health System.

"The adage, 'An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,' especially applies to overseas travel, so prepare ahead," he says.

Here's what you need to know to travel safely, before you leave home.

4-6 weeks before

Depending on your destination, you may need several travel vaccines. Search the CDC Destination pages to see which shots you need.

"Vaccines take time before they become protective. Some may make you feel tired, feverish or give you a headache or rash," says Dr. Dickinson. According to the CDC, however, only about 15 percent of people experience a reaction. Severe reactions

are rare, but if you're sensitive to medicine, stay at the clinic for 15-30 minutes after getting immunized. If you're concerned about getting a scar, don't be. Today's vaccines leave you blemish-free.

Be prepared to make the most of your doctor's visit. "Tell the health care provider about your destination, trip activities, existing medical conditions, current medications, and your immunization and illness history. While you may need special vaccines such as typhoid fever, above all, make sure you're current with routine immunizations for chickenpox, polio, measles-mumps-rubella, diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis, and the flu." Measles is of particular concern recently, with health officials saying that international travel is partly to blame for the recent rise in U.S. cases. When unvaccinated travelers return from overseas, they can carry the disease. Madagascar and the Ukraine are struggling with major measles outbreaks and the European Union is seeing about 1,000 cases per month.

When you visit a clinic, ask about other ways to stay healthy while traveling. "Avoiding mosquitoes and other insects and preventing food-borne illnesses is arguably just as important than vaccines, and you should plan for both," says Dr. Dickinson.

If traveling with kids, stick to their regular vaccination schedule. Your pediatrician may need to consult with a travel medicine specialist, since small children do not tolerate certain travel vaccinations.

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1-2 weeks before

When a trip comes up suddenly, visit a doctor anyway. "Even one or two vaccines

provide some protection and certain multiple-dose vaccinations protect you, even after one dose,” says Dr. Dickinson. If necessary, it’s possible to get certain shots over a shorter period of time.

When visiting countries where mosquito-borne diseases exist, ask your doctor about anti-malaria drugs. The drugs don’t provide complete protection, so apply an EPA-approved insect repellent (before applying sunscreen), wear protective clothing, and stay indoors at dusk. If sexually active, use condoms to avoid sexually transmitted diseases - which now include the Zika virus.



Don’t forget to pack your World Health Organization “yellow card” vaccination confirmation. The Travel Medicine Clinic can provide a copy. Before your departure, visit the U.S. Department of State website for travel-related health information and enroll in the government's Smart Traveler for safety updates on your destination.

To schedule an appointment for your travel vaccines at the UHealth Travel Medicine Clinic, call 305-243-8747. Find your closest UHealth Walgreens Clinic by calling 305-243-4357 or by visiting this website.

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