

## Travel Health - PeerCorps Trust Fund

Travelers need to remain aware and constantly alert of any health concerns which may arise, and learn how to minimize their risk of being ill while working onsite. It is their responsibility to obtain information, understand the risks involved, take the necessary precautions for the travel experience and obtain insurance coverage. Early planning and taking preventative measures can significantly reduce the risk of health risks.

Travelers may encounter sudden and significant changes in altitude, humidity, microbes and temperature, which can result in ill-health. In addition, serious health risks may arise in areas where accommodation is of substandard quality, hygiene and sanitation are inadequate, medical services are not well developed and clean water is unavailable. Those planning travel should become informed about the potential hazards of the countries they are traveling to and learn how to minimize any risk to their health.

### Vaccines

Generally, vaccines need to be given about 4-6 months in advance of traveling. You will need to be up-to-date on your routine vaccines. These include influenza, chickenpox (varicella), polio, measles/mumps/rubella, and diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus. You must receive the required ones before traveling. Speak more with your physician about the recommended vaccines based on your individual health risk assessment. Some of these may include tuberculosis, cholera, hepatitis A and B, and rabies. At the minimum it is highly recommended that travelers be vaccinated against both hepatitis A and B. It is helpful to be knowledgeable about these vaccines before visiting your physician. A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required for persons traveling to Tanzania from an endemic country<sup>1</sup>. This should be given 10 days prior to traveling.

Even if an individual does not need any vaccines, it is still important to get a check-up before traveling. This also includes dental and gynecological (and other specialists you may currently visit) check-ups as well; to ensure the healthiest traveling experience possible.

### Emerging Infectious Diseases

Emerging infectious diseases include the fairly new diseases to the population, and the already existing diseases which may be rapidly increasing in incidence

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<sup>1</sup>**Endemic countries currently include:** Angola, Argentina, Benin, Bolivia, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central Africa Republic, Costa Rica, Colombia, Congo, Ivory Coast, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ecuador, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, French, Guyana, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Guyana, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Honduras, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Suriname, Togo, Uganda and Venezuela. Source: [http://tanzaniahighcommission.co.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=62&Itemid=73](http://tanzaniahighcommission.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=62&Itemid=73)

or geographical range. Travelers need to be aware of the specific diseases they may encounter while traveling. Also, keep in mind that outbreaks or newly emerging diseases are often unpredictable.

Some infectious diseases to be aware of in Tanzania: Typhus fever (not the same as Typhoid Fever) is transmitted by body lice; therefore, cleanliness and hygiene are important. Plague is typically transmitted by rodents, occurring sporadically or in outbreaks. A vaccine is available for those who are occupationally exposed, but in most countries it is not available for commercial use. Avoid contact with all dead/alive rodents. HIV/AIDS can be contracted via dirty needles and unprotected sex. It is extremely important to take the preventative measures to avoid contracting this disease. Typhoid fever generally occurs by ingestion of contaminated food or water. Prevention measures include vaccinations and precautions to food-borne/water-borne infections.

Malaria exists in Tanzania throughout the year in all areas below 1800 m. The recommended prevention for this is a prophylactic, or anti-malarial drugs prescribed by a physician. Although no regimen gives complete protection, it may make malaria easier to treat. Chloroquine is not an effective anti-malarial drug in Tanzania and should not be taken to prevent malaria in this region. Malaria develops between seven to nine days after onset. Anyone experiencing symptoms during this time period should seek immediate medical attention.

#### **Insect Protection Measures:**

- Apply insect repellent containing DEET.
- Spray flying insect spray to help keep rooms free of mosquitoes (this should contain a pyrethroid insecticide).
- Secure screened windows.
- Have bed nets treated with permethrin (particularly if you're not sleeping in an air conditioned or well screened room).
- Remove standing water in and around your place of residence.
- Wear long-sleeves and pants, especially between dusk and dawn.
- Wear hats, especially between dusk and dawn.

Dengue, filariasis, leishmaniasis, and onchocerciasis (river blindness) are other diseases carried by insects that also occur in East Africa. African trypanosomiasis (African sleeping sickness) has increased in the region, and is highly endemic in Tanzania. It is contracted by a tsetse fly (gray-brown color, about the size of a honeybee). Bites are quite painful, so travelers often recall the bites. Prevention of trypanosomiasis includes wearing neutral colored pants and long sleeved shirts.

## **Insurance**

Utilizing the health care system while traveling can be very expensive, and keep in mind that some medical insurance companies do not include coverage outside your country. However, it is possible to purchase a short-term policy specifically made to insure travelers. To do so, look into offers given by travel agents, tour operators, and private companies. If your health insurance does cover medical issues outside of your country, be sure to carry your insurance card or some proof of insurance with you at all times. It is crucial to maintain health insurance in areas where health risks are significant and medical care is expensive or unavailable.

## **Medications**

Travelers with already existing health concerns should carry a signed document from their physician describing the condition and any medications/prescriptions (including generics). Travelers should check with the country they are visiting to confirm these medications are not considered illegal narcotics. Additionally, any medications carried while traveling should be left in their original containers with a readable label. Pack these in the carry-on luggage in case the checked-luggage is lost. For added protection, pack an extra supply on the checked-luggage.

Consider wearing a medical alert bracelet if you have serious allergies, reactions, or other serious health concerns. This allows more efficient help in case of an emergency. Furthermore, it would be useful to carry a medical kit (or a first aid kit) consisting of basic supplies in case a situation where they are needed arises. This should include anti-diarrheal drugs or medicated charcoal, which are typically over-the-counter.

## **Other Health Tips (hygiene, sanitation, water quality, accommodations, etc.)**

- Carry antibacterial wipes / hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol to keep your hands and body clean, which are great prevention methods for various diseases and illnesses.
- Avoid touching animals (including house pets such as dogs and cats), because they may bite or scratch you, causing disease. If you are bitten or scratched, wash the wound immediately with soap and water, and seek prompt medical attention.
- Never share needles, and use latex condoms to help prevent against HIV/AIDS and other STIs.
- Don't walk around barefoot in areas where animals may have defecated (especially beaches).

- Avoid eating food purchased from food vendors.
- Eat fully cooked food.
- Only consume pasteurized dairy products.
- Avoid tap water, fountain drinks, and ice cubes.
- Use iodine tablets and water filters (to purify water) if bottled water is not available.
- Take all precautions to avoid injury (i.e. helmet and seatbelt when in vehicles).

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control's website provides comprehensive and useful travel health related information for Tanzania: <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/destinationTanzania.aspx>

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