

Stay healthy abroad: Why you should see a travel medicine specialist before your trip

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As you get ready to travel to another country, you probably have many details to coordinate and plan. One essential task, depending on where those travels take you, may be to make an appointment to see a travel medicine specialist.

A travel medicine specialist assesses travel-related risks and provides information to ensure your health and safety while minimizing the potential for health-related situations during your trip.

Adding a consultation to your travel to-do list

A consultation with a travel medicine specialist includes discussing travel-related illnesses, [risk factors](#) for infectious and noninfectious diseases, required immunizations, health regulations and drug-resistant organisms you may encounter.

It's crucial to schedule a pretravel consultation at least two weeks—and preferably four to eight weeks—before your trip to ensure you get complete protection from any needed vaccinations. When requesting a travel medicine consultation, be prepared to provide information about your trip, including:

- All countries being visited
- Any transportation, accommodation or other circumstances that are out of the usual
- Dates and duration of travel

A travel medicine specialist will review your itinerary before your consultation to identify country-by-country health risks, such as exotic infectious agents, the potential for [altitude sickness](#) or [heat exhaustion](#), as well as appropriate vaccinations and possible need for malaria-prevention medications.

Your opportunity to learn about staying healthy abroad

A consultation gives you the opportunity to learn about health risks you

may face while you're traveling and once you reach your destinations. Based on your itinerary, the travel medicine specialist may:

- Explain the risks of infection from mosquito-borne illnesses and the steps for protecting yourself. This includes reviewing medications to prevent malaria, which is a potentially life-threatening illness.
- Ensure you receive protection against vaccine-preventable illnesses, such as hepatitis A or [typhoid fever](#), and verify that other routine vaccinations are current.
- Evaluate your overall health for travel and discuss with you how to manage preexisting conditions.
- Give tips for preventing jet lag, [motion sickness](#), altitude illness and blood clots.
- Go over how to prevent and treat traveler's diarrhea, the most common travel-related illness.
- Help you reduce the chance of becoming ill during travel.
- Provide a yellow fever vaccination and an International Certificate of Vaccination, also known as a yellow card, if you travel to a country where the vaccine is recommended or required.
- Review food and water precautions. Contaminated food and water can pose disease risk for travelers, many of which are transmitted via by swallowing or coming in contact with impure water, such as fresh or sea water and swimming pools.

Be sure to ask the specialist any questions you may have about your personal health and raise any safety concerns about your travel itinerary.

Get sick on your trip? Check-in with a travel medicine specialist

Once you return home, a travel medicine specialist also can conduct a comprehensive post-travel evaluation of any illnesses you may have picked up while away, including [parasitic infections](#) and other tropical diseases that are rare in the U.S.

No matter the reason for travel—vacation, business, studying abroad, visiting friends or relatives or [medical tourism](#)—always be prepared and take steps to ensure your health and safety.

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