

International travel: Don't forget your child's vaccinations, says pediatrician

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Exploring Europe, taking an African safari, going on a trip to the tropics: In many cases, vaccines are needed for travel, and that's doubly true for children.

According to pediatrician Dr. Lauren Nguyen, researching what vaccines are needed and preparing well before your family's departure is crucial.

"I tell my families that it's best to come in about six weeks prior to international travel," said Nguyen, who's based in Torrance, Calif. and is affiliated with the Children's Hospital Los Angeles Care Network.

Meet with your child's pediatrician to review travel plans, figure out what vaccines are required or recommended based on your travel destination and arrange to get any shots needed. That consultation is probably best done with an in-person visit, not a phone call, Nguyen noted.

Not sure what shots the country you're visiting requires? Head to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [Travelers' Health website](#) for up to date info for countries worldwide.

"The CDC website tells you about any current outbreaks, as well as the recommended vaccines for that country," Nguyen said in a hospital news release.

Besides any special vaccines required by the country you're visiting, make sure your child is up to date on routine shots for seasonal infections like COVID, flu and RSV.

Planning ahead is crucial because many vaccines require multiple doses given weeks apart, Nguyen noted. Pediatricians may also not have large supplies of vaccines for diseases like [yellow fever](#) or typhoid, and may need time to order them.

Then there's time needed for vaccines to give your child's immune system a full boost. "It takes about two to four weeks to respond to the [vaccine](#) and develop the antibodies," Nguyen explained.

And it's not just about needles: Daily dose malaria pills, for example, need to be started up to two weeks before departure, taken the entire period that you're in a malaria zone, and then taken for a month after you return home.

Vaccine schedules also vary by age, Ngyuen noted. [Measles](#) outbreaks are occurring worldwide with greater frequency, and measles vaccine recommendations are different for babies versus [older children](#).

Children typically wait to get the first dose of the measles vaccine between the ages of 12 and 15 months and the second dose between 4 and 6 years of age.

However, for infants "that changes for international travel," Nguyen said. "Children between 6 and 12 months of age should get a first dose of the measles vaccine prior to travel." That first dose should still be followed up by a second dose between the ages of 4 and 6, she added.

Hepatitis A is typically contracted through contaminated water or food. Again, routine vaccination recommendations suggest that a child get their first hep A shot between 12 and 23 months of age.

However, "infants 6 to 11 months old should be vaccinated when protection against hepatitis A is recommended for the destination," Nguyen said. And if your baby is very young—under 2 months of age—you probably shouldn't travel internationally unless it's absolutely necessary, she added.

Another key shot is the meningitis A (MenACWY) vaccine. It's easily transmitted and Nguyen suggests that kids be vaccinated against meningitis A before travel, especially when people are circulating in close quarters, such as on [cruise ships](#).

Kids ages 16 and older should also be immunized against the meningitis B vaccine.

Cruise ships can be hotbeds of infection, so don't forget vaccinations even if you aren't docking at exotic locales.

"The people you'll be on the ship with might have been vacationing all over the world," she explained. "Vaccines can protect your children from a wide range of illnesses these passengers might bring on board."

Besides shots and pills, you can take other steps to keep you and your family safe while abroad. According to Nguyen, these include bringing:

- Insect repellent
- Children's acetaminophen, ibuprofen and Benadryl
- Hydrocortisone cream
- Electrolyte-replacement powder (like Pedialyte), to help curb dehydration
- Sunscreen
- Your health insurance card

Last but not least, make sure you have adequate [travel](#) health insurance so you can access care should any health emergencies arise.

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