

Health Advice - India

You must discuss your own particular needs and contraindications to vaccines or tablets with your doctor or practice nurse. Advice can change so check again for future visits. Ensure you are fully insured for medical emergencies including repatriation. The 'T7' leaflet (from Post Offices) gives details of health care agreements between countries.

IMMUNISATIONS

Confirm primary courses and boosters are up to date as recommended for life in Britain - including vaccines given to special groups because of risk exposure or complications (e.g. influenza and pneumococcal vaccines for the elderly).

Courses or boosters usually advised:

Infection	Description and advice
Diphtheria	Spread through close respiratory contact. Vaccination is advised if close contact with locals in risk areas is likely.
Hepatitis A	A faecal / oral infection spread through contaminated food and water. It is very common in crowded conditions where hygiene is poor. Hepatitis A causes liver inflammation and jaundice. In risk areas you should be immunised if good hygiene is impossible.
Polio	Spread mainly through faecally contaminated food and water. Polio boosters should be up to date.
Tetanus	Tetanus is contracted through dirty cuts and scratches.
Typhoid	A faecal / oral infection spread through contaminated food and water. It is common in crowded conditions where hygiene is poor. Typhoid causes septicaemia.

Vaccines sometimes advised:

Infection	Description and advice
Hepatitis B	Spread through infected blood, contaminated needles and sexual intercourse, It affects the liver, causes jaundice and occasionally liver failure. Those visiting high risk areas for long periods or at social or occupational risk should be immunised.
Rabies	Spread through bites or licks on broken skin from an infected animal. It is always fatal. Vaccination is advised for those going to risk areas that will be remote from a reliable source of vaccine. Even when pre-exposure vaccines have been received urgent medical advice should be sought after any animal bite.
Tuberculosis	Most commonly transmitted via droplet infection. Those going to countries where it is common, especially those mixing closely with the local population and those at occupational risk, e.g. health care workers, should ensure that they have previously been immunised. Check with your doctor or nurse.
Japanese B Encephalitis	Spread by mosquitoes. It is a serious infection of the brain and vaccination is advised for those in risk areas unable to avoid mosquito bites, staying for long periods (e.g. more than 4 weeks) or visiting rural areas.

Meningococcal Meningitis	Spread by droplet infection through close personal contact. Vaccination is advised if close contact with local personnel is likely
Cholera	Spread through contaminated water and food. More common during floods and rainy seasons. Those unable to take effective precautions, for example, during wars and when working in refugee camps or slums may consider vaccination.
Yellow Fever	Certificate required if over 6 months old and entering from, or being in transit through, an 'infected area' within the previous 6 days.

MALARIA

Malaria is a serious and sometimes fatal disease transmitted by mosquitoes. You cannot be vaccinated against malaria.

Malaria Precautions

Malaria precautions are essential in all areas below 2000m, all year round. There is no risk in Himachal Pradesh, Jammu, Kashmir and Sikkim, which are at high altitude. Avoid mosquito bites by covering up with clothing such as long sleeves and long trousers especially after sunset, light coloured clothing acts as a deterrent. Using a good insect repellents on exposed skin is advisable.

Check with your doctor or nurse about suitable antimalarial tablets. **Chloroquine** is usually recommended. Although there are resistant strains to this. **Mefloquine** and **Proquanil** (paludrine) are alternatives. **Malarone** is fairly new with little or no side effects ...but expensive. Prompt investigation of fever is essential.

Avoiding Tummy Upsets

It is very common to have an upset tummy or diarrhea at least once during a trip to India caused by a change of diet or maybe the different kinds bacteria etc we are likely to encounter. If you would like to lessen the risks, drink only bottled or boiled water, don't eat uncooked food or salads which could have been washed in unsafe water and regularly wash hands or use an anti-bacterial hand gel (available from most chemists). Failing this make sure you have some diarrhea medication such as Immodium to hand, rest, drink plenty of water and possibly take rehydration salts.

Deep Vein Thrombosis

Low dose aspirin should be considered by the elderly and those with mobility problems to reduce the risk of venous thrombosis during air flights. A subcutaneous injection of heparin as 'MiniHep' is probably more effective and should be considered if thought to be very prone to thrombosis - it is effective for about 24 hours. Getting up and stretching your legs is a good idea on long flights to get your circulation moving and this helps prevent Deep Vein Thrombosis.

Health Insurance

Adequate medical insurance cover including repatriation is important and insurance companies must be told of any serious existing health problem.

Prescribed Medications

Take ample supplies of your own medications. Medical facilities en route and at the travel destination may be of poor or different to those at home. Familiar medications may not be available and trade names may be different. Drug review by your doctor before departure should pay special attention to diuretics, insulin, hypnotics, H2 antagonists, anti-epileptics, corticosteroids and possible interactions with anti-malaria medication or vaccines. Consider vaccination against influenza in addition to others recommended for your destination.

Advise airlines and airport authorities of special medical, dietary and mobility requirements. They can often arrange transport around airports if notified in advance. Consider whether the special form should be completed to advise transport agents of disability before departure. Those with serious respiratory problems should consider asking for supplemental oxygen before undertaking air flights. Essential medication should always be carried on the traveller's person or in hand luggage.