



REGIONE DEL VENETO

MIGRANT POPULATIONS: TRAVEL AND HEALTH

Health advice for persons returning to their country of origin



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INTRODUCTION

This booklet provides health information for non-EU immigrants periodically returning to their countries of origin.

Many diseases present in tropical areas can be prevented by having vaccinations and adopting simple precautions.

In all the Local Health Authorities of the Veneto Region there is a Travel Clinic for the prevention of diseases of travellers, where they can receive advice and have the vaccinations useful for their travel.

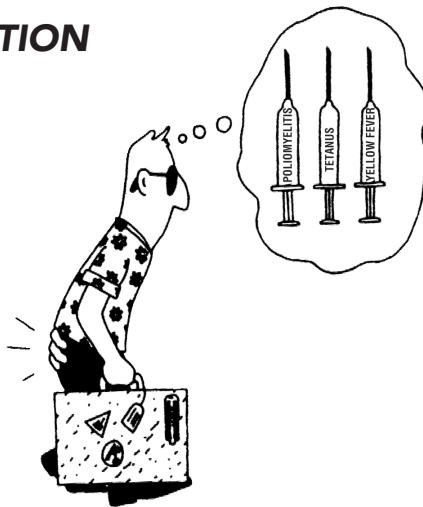
1 - BEFORE LEAVING

Before travelling you should contact your family doctor and your children's paediatrician in order to obtain information and advice on certain drugs you should take with you and which may be useful. At least one month before your departure you can fix an appointment with the staff of the Travel Clinic of your Local Health Authority so as to receive the vaccinations in good time.

Even if your departure is imminent, you should still ask the advice of the clinic's health care providers so as to reduce health risks during your travel and stay abroad.

Travelling is not advised for pregnant women and very young infants.

1.1 VACCINATION



YELLOW FEVER

What is yellow fever? How is it transmitted?

Yellow fever is a very serious and often fatal disease that affects the liver and is caused by a virus transmitted to

man by a mosquito that generally bites during the day. It is present throughout equatorial Africa and in the northern areas of South America.

When should you have the vaccination?

At least 10 days before leaving and it is valid for 10 years. Children can be vaccinated from the 6th month of life onwards.

TETANUS-DIPHTHERIA

What are tetanus and diphtheria? How are they transmitted?

Tetanus is a very serious and often fatal disease due to a bacillus transmitted through wounds and even minor abrasions or also by using non-sterile materials for tattooing, circumcision, abortion or during childbirth.

Diphtheria is caused by a bacterium transmitted by droplets of saliva expelled into the air by the spitting, sneezing or coughing of a sick person or of a carrier who does not present any symptoms of the disease. It can damage the heart, kidneys and brain; very dense membranes are formed in the throat that may lead to suffocation and death.

When should you have the vaccinations?

You can have the vaccinations even only shortly before travelling and they afford protection for at least 10 years. Children born in Italy are vaccinated during the first year of life.

POLIOMYELITIS

What is poliomyelitis? How is it transmitted?

The disease is due to a virus transmitted by ingesting

contaminated water or food and pharyngeal secretions, causing paralysis mainly of the limbs in the severer cases. In some cases polio can be a cause of death.

When should you have the vaccination?

Children born in Italy are vaccinated during the first year of life.

You can have the vaccination shortly before leaving for your trip and it will protect you for at least 10 years. It is indicated for both adults and children who have never been vaccinated and are returning to their countries, especially if epidemics are underway there. In such cases, even if the vaccination schedule has been completed, you should think about taking a booster dose of the vaccine.

TYPHOID FEVER

What is typhoid fever? How is it transmitted?

Typhoid fever is a serious feverish infection accompanied by diarrhoea caused by a bacterium transmitted by ingesting contaminated water or food.

When should you have the vaccination?

The vaccination should be administered 10 to 15 days before leaving. If you travel frequently it is wise to repeat it every 3 years.



HEPATITIS A

What is hepatitis A? How is it transmitted?

This is a disease caused by a virus that affects the liver and is transmitted by consumption of contaminated food or drinking-water.

When should you have the vaccination?

A dose can be administered even shortly before your departure and the protection it affords lasts at least 1 year. If a second dose is taken after 6 to 12 months the protection lasts at least 10 years.

Vaccination is advisable above all for children, who can be vaccinated any time after the age of 5 months.

HEPATITIS B

What is hepatitis B?

This is a contagious disease that affects the liver. It is caused by a virus that penetrates into the body via the blood or other body fluids, including semen and vaginal fluid. It is transmitted by sick people or by carriers of the virus who may not present symptoms of the disease.

How is it transmitted?

By sexual intercourse or contact with infected blood, even through minor wounds (contaminated needles, razors, tooth-brushes, combs and any sharp or cutting instrument), tattoos, and hypodermic needle pricks. Children can be infected at birth by a sick mother or carrier of the virus.

When should you have the vaccination?

At least one month before leaving. Children born in Italy are vaccinated during the first year of life.

It should be stressed that the vaccine protects you only against hepatitis B.

For those who have occasional sexual intercourse, in addition to the vaccination, the use of a condom is recommended, which also affords protection against other diseases such as AIDS, syphilis, gonorrhoea and other sexually transmitted infections.

MENINGOCOCCAL MENINGITIS

What is meningococcal meningitis? How is it transmitted?

This is a disease caused by bacteria and is transmitted by saliva droplets of sick people or people who have the microbe but do not present symptoms. In the severest cases it can cause brain damage and death.

When should you have the vaccination?

At least 10 to 15 days before leaving, and it will protect you for about 3 years.

Vaccination is indicated for travellers returning to their countries of origin for long periods (equatorial Africa) or if epidemics are underway there.

The vaccination certificate is a compulsory requirement for pilgrims travelling to the Mecca.

MEASLES

What is measles? How is it transmitted?

Measles is a highly contagious disease caused by a virus. It is transmitted by saliva droplets or by direct contact with the nasal secretions of a sick person. In young children, in particular, it can cause pneumonia and damage to the hearing apparatus and the brain.

When should you have the vaccination?

The vaccination should be administered at least 10 days before leaving.

Children born in Italy are generally vaccinated between 12 and 15 months of age and re-vaccinated at 5 to 6 years. The vaccination can be given at any age to people who have never been vaccinated or have not yet had the disease. The vaccine is available in combination with the rubella and mumps vaccines, these being two other important diseases caused by viruses.

RABIES

What is rabies? How is it transmitted?

This is a widespread disease in all tropical and subtropical countries and is due to a virus found in the saliva of infected animals (dogs, foxes, jackals, bats, etc.). It is transmitted by bites and scratches and is invariably fatal once symptoms appear.

When should you have the vaccine?

At least one month before leaving and it protects you for

about 3 years.

It is indicated in order to prevent the disease in those who spend lengthy stays in high-risk areas, especially if the vaccine might not be immediately available.

In view of the serious nature of the disease, in cases of bites inflicted by suspect animals, even when vaccinated, you should consult a hospital or other healthcare facility as soon as possible to receive further treatment.

CHOLERA

What is cholera? How is it transmitted?

Cholera is a disease caused by bacteria transmitted in contaminated food and water and manifests with a major attack of diarrhoea.

When should you have the vaccination?

The vaccination should be administered at least 10 days before leaving and affords 6 months' protection.

In view of the brief duration of the protection afforded by the vaccine, it is important, if you wish to avoid cholera infection, to closely follow the advice regarding water and food described in the section here below.

2 - WHILE TRAVELLING

2.1 RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH FOOD AND DRINK

A number of infectious diseases, manifesting mainly in the form of diarrhoea, can be contracted in food and drink. This risk is higher in tropical or subtropical countries. If you are returning to your country of origin, particularly when you have children born in Italy where eating habits are different, you would be well advised to follow some simple advice which will help you to experience your stay in good health.



Did you know that water that does not come from a safe source can be the cause of disease?

You will be surer of not falling sick if you take the following precautions:

- always drink water from sealed bottles or from safe sources (deep wells);
- if you do not have bottled water, you can drink tea or normal water after boiling it for a few minutes;
- use ice only if prepared with water from a safe source;

- when cleaning your teeth, always use water that has been boiled or that comes from a safe source.

Did you know that food must be eaten well cooked?

The cooking of food destroys the germs that may be responsible for major forms of diarrhoea and consequently:

- eat well-cooked food and food served still hot after cooking;
- avoid uncooked food, particularly meat, fish, eggs, green salad, and fruit salad;
- uncooked fruit and vegetables can be eaten if washed with water from a safe source. Fruit with peel should be peeled personally only after washing your hands thoroughly;
- use milk that has been properly bottled/packaged and pasteurized or boil it before drinking.

Did you know it is important to wash your hands properly?

Your hands may be responsible for spreading a number of infectious diseases during the preparation and consumption of food.

Always wash your hands with soap and water, particularly every time you use the toilet and before starting to eat a meal.

Did you know that the hygiene of places where food is bought or consumed is important?

Food stored in rooms which are not very clean and infested with insects may cause intestinal infections. We therefore advise you to purchase food and drink in places which are clean and where the food has been stored properly: hawkers or open markets offer few guarantees of proper hygiene.

If you decide to eat out, choose clean places protected against flies.

2.2 INFORMATION ABOUT MALARIA

Are you familiar with malaria? Do you know how it is transmitted?

Malaria is a disease which is present in the tropical areas of the world and particularly in Asia, equatorial Africa and Central and South America. It is caused by parasites that are transmitted to man by mosquitoes, that bite mainly between sunset and sunrise.

What are the manifestations of the disease?

The disease manifests mainly with fever. There may also be associated shivering, headache, pain and muscular debility, vomiting, diarrhoea and coughing.

The symptoms set in within approximately 7 to 30 days of being bitten by the infected mosquito, and more rarely after a few months.

The disease must be diagnosed as early as possible (in the first 24 hours) after the onset of symptoms, otherwise, if neglected, it can prove very serious and even fatal.

Recommendations before organizing a trip to a country where malaria is rife:

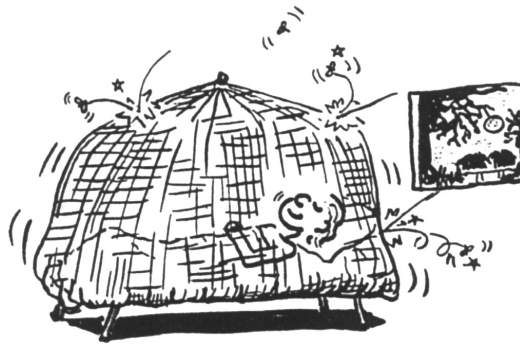
- bear in mind that during the rainy season the risk of contracting malaria is higher because of the increased presence of mosquitoes;
- pregnant women, if possible, should postpone their trip, because they can get very sick and even lose their baby;
- do not take newborn babies and infant children to malaria areas, unless it is absolutely necessary, since the disease may be very serious in such young infants.



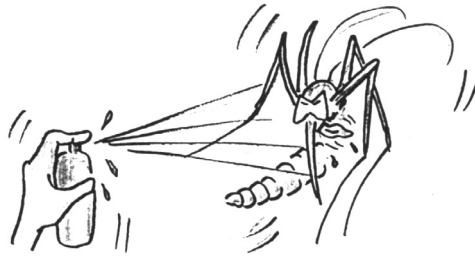
What protective measures can you take to reduce the risk of contracting malaria?

Bear in mind that the most important thing in absolute terms is to protect yourself well against mosquito bites, and consequently:

- stay, if possible, in accommodation that is well built and in a good state of upkeep and protect the doors and windows with mosquito nets. If you don't have any mosquito netting, keep the doors and windows closed from dusk onwards. Before going to bed make sure there are no mosquitoes in the room;
- cover the bed with a mosquito net fixing it firmly under the mattress. Make sure that the net is not torn and that there are no mosquitoes under the net. For greater protection impregnate it with an insecticide;
- if you go out in the evening (remember that the risky period is from dusk to the early hours of the morning), wear sufficiently thick, light-coloured clothing with long sleeves and thick socks;
- do not use perfumes or aftershave lotions because they attract mosquitoes;



- smear insect repellent lotions every 3-4 hours on the uncovered parts of the body; be careful because the lotions are eliminated by rubbing and by rain. The most effective product is diethyltoluamide (Autan), which should not, however, be used in pregnancy;
- use permethrine-based insecticides to be sprayed on clothing to prevent mosquitoes from biting you through your garments;
- do not spray insect repellent products or insecticides on the face, eyes or lips.



Do you know how to take antimalarial drugs?

Antimalarial drugs must be prescribed by your family doctor or by the Travel Clinic doctor for international travellers; they will indicate the most suitable prophylaxis for you and your family.

If the drug prescribed causes unwanted effects, talk to

your doctor about it in order to decide whether to go on taking the drug or replace it with another.

REMEMBER!!!

Even if you are taking antimalarial drugs, if fever occurs one week or more after a stay in an area where malaria is rife, you are advised to consult a doctor or healthcare centre immediately (at most within 24 hours) to find out whether you are sick and start appropriate treatment.

3 - AFTER YOUR RETURN

A number of diseases of tropical areas may manifest some time after your trip. If, on returning to Italy, you experience symptoms such as fever, diarrhoea, belly-ache, or skin rashes, consult a doctor and tell him about your stay in the country concerned.

It is important to continue taking antimalarial drugs even after returning from your trip. Many cases of malaria occur in people who have stopped taking the prophylaxis too soon.

You can ask for advice and information at the Travel Clinic for the prevention of disease in travellers, which works in close collaboration with the regional and national specialist reference facilities.

It is important, on your return, to complete the vaccination schedules initiated before leaving.

CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i>	pag. 1
<i>1. Before leaving</i>	
1.1 <i>Vaccinations</i>	pag. 3
<i>2. While travelling</i>	
2.1 <i>Risks associated with food and drink</i>	pag. 10
2.2 <i>Information about malaria</i>	pag. 12
<i>3. After your return</i>	pag. 15

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