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What Vaccinations Do I Need?

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Although diseases such as polio, rubella and typhoid are uncommon, they do occur in many destinations common to ships at sea. As a result, routine vaccinations are essential for crew protection. As well, they help prevent the importation of infectious diseases across international borders.

Which vaccinations you need will depend on a number of factors, including your destination, whether you will be spending time in rural areas, the season during which you are traveling, your age, health status, and previous immunizations.

MedAire recommends the following primary immunizations be kept up to date for all international travelers, including maritime crewmembers:

- **DT (diphtheria/tetanus):** Good for a 10-year period, provides protection if injured at home or abroad. Diphtheria still occurs throughout the world.
- **Polio:** One-time adult polio vaccination, injectable form only. Cases of polio are still reported in areas of South America, Africa and Asia.
- **MMR:** One-time adult booster, *only necessary if born after 1956*. Risk of getting measles, if not immune, exists throughout the world.
- **Hepatitis A:** After the primary series of two injections is completed (the second injection is given 6–12 months after the initial injection), the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in the U.S. states that for children and adults who complete the primary series, booster doses of vaccine are not recommended. Hepatitis A is a food and water-borne disease. It is prevalent in most developing countries – even in the best hotels and restaurants – and is a viral disease of the liver.
- **Typhoid:** The oral vaccine is recommended, as it provides more stomach protection and is better tolerated. This protection lasts for five years. If the oral form is not available, Typhim Vi injection is the other choice and lasts for two years. This is also a food and water-borne disease.
- **Influenza:** Needs to be repeated yearly. Influenza risk exists throughout the world, and other areas may have a different influenza season than the U.S.

For those who travel to multiple international destinations, MedAire strongly recommends the following secondary immunizations:

- **Yellow fever:** This immunization is good for 10 years, and it may be required for entrance to specific countries. **Tropical South America, sub-Saharan Africa and Trinidad/Tobago are considered to be endemic zones.**
- **Hepatitis B series:** After completing the series of three injections, the CDC recommends that for adults whose immune status is normal, booster doses of vaccine are not recommended. Hepatitis B is a blood-borne disease; you may be at risk if you need to be treated for a medical condition or illness in another country.
- **Malaria prophylaxis:** The choice of medication will depend on the country being visited, as widespread resistance has made some vaccines obsolete in various parts of the world. Please contact the MedAire 24/7 MedLink Global Response Center for further assistance.

Ideally, you should set up an appointment with your travel medicine provider four to six weeks prior to travel. Most vaccines take time to become effective in your body, and some vaccines must be given in a series over a period of days or sometimes weeks. Even if your scheduled travel is less than four weeks away, you should still consult with your travel medicine provider. You might still benefit from shots or medications and other information about how to protect yourself from illness and injury while traveling.

As with anything, knowledge and prevention is the key to a successful voyage. Knowing your destination and risk prior to travel will be an important factor in ensuring a safe and healthy trip.

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