

# UPDATE Clinical Module 1745

**This module covers:**

- Common travel vaccinations
- Timing of vaccinations and costs and where travellers can be vaccinated
- Case studies on last-minute travel arrangements and vaccination in pregnancy
- Sources of information and advice

April

**Clinical:** Travel month

● Staying safe on holiday April 4

● Motion sickness April 11\*

● **Travel vaccinations** April 18

**Practice:** How to build a pharmacy brand April 25

*\*Online only for Update Plus subscribers*

# Travel vaccinations

**Nancy Kane**

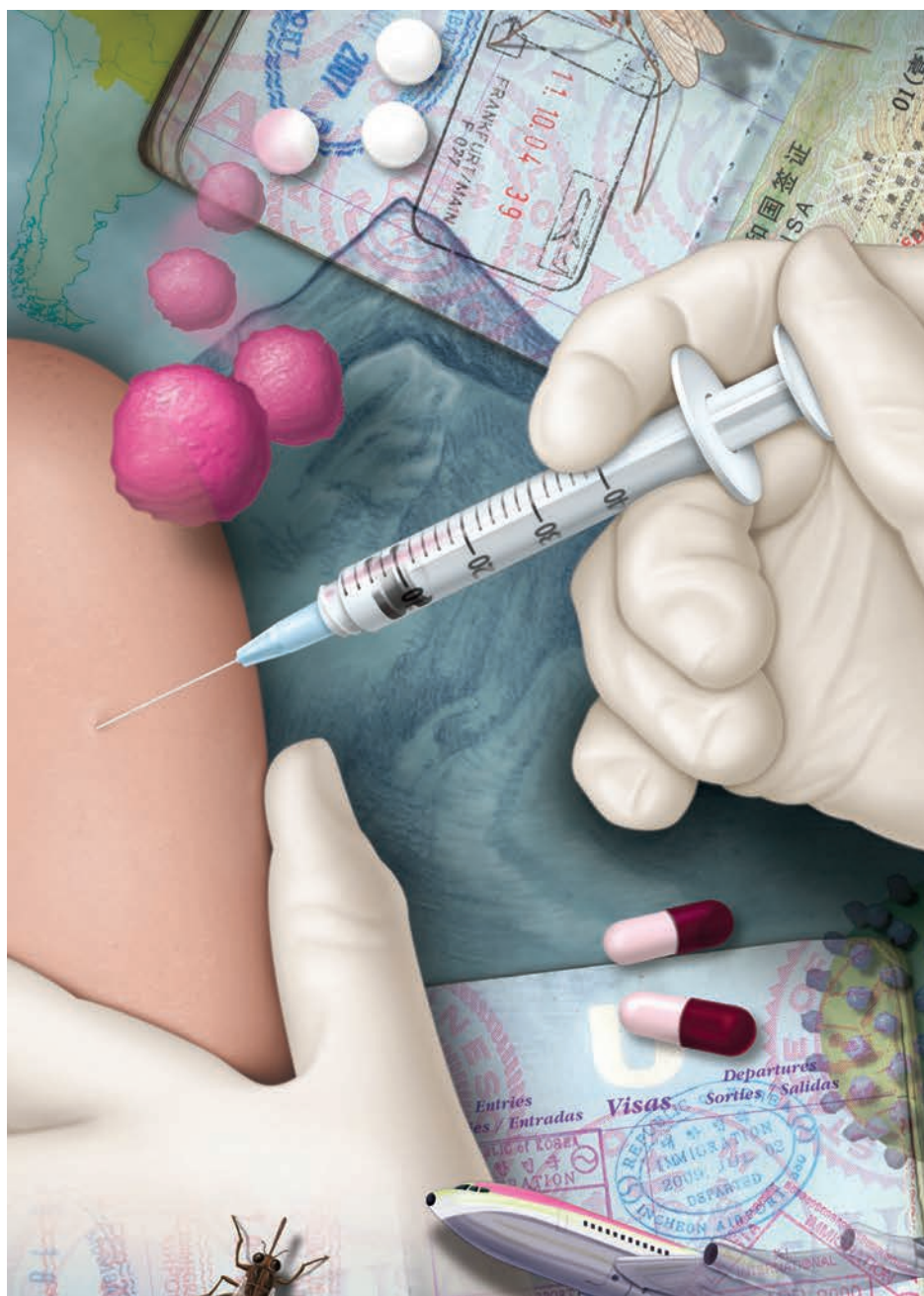
While some aspects of planning a holiday or business trip are pretty straightforward - booking the hotel, organising meetings, planning when to see the sights - making sure you stay healthy while abroad can be more complicated. In fact, many people do not even realise that they may need to be vaccinated before travelling to ensure they stay fit and healthy. Many parts of the world have endemic diseases that are not a problem in the UK, and vaccination can be crucial to preventing illnesses that range from merely inconvenient to severe and life-threatening.

The required vaccinations change from country to country and even from month to month because the risks of many diseases rise and fall with the seasons. However, as a general rule, vaccines are likely to be needed for countries or regions where sanitation might be poor, with patchy access to clean water. Likewise, climates that support insects such as ticks and mosquitoes can lead to the spread of a multitude of illnesses. Pharmacists have an important role to play in helping patients travel safely, whether by running a travel clinic and supplying vaccinations, or providing information, reassurance and signposting.

## Common travel vaccines

Some of the most commonly required travel vaccines are easily overlooked; before travelling to almost any destination it is recommended that every traveller makes sure they are up to date with the vaccines normally recommended for life in the UK.

Since measles, mumps and rubella are still common in much of the world, this includes vaccines such as the MMR, which are not routinely given to adults. People born before 1970 will generally be immune to these illnesses, but those born later should consider vaccination unless they are known to be immune, whether due to vaccination or previous infection.



Customers should be advised to research travel vaccinations during the early stages of planning a holiday

## Toxic phase yellow fever is fatal in 75 per cent of cases.

Influenza vaccination should also be considered for everyone who usually gets an annual jab. Remember that the flu season occurs at different times of the year around the world, as do the prevalent strains in circulation. Suitable vaccines for other regions can be difficult to obtain in the UK so travellers might need to seek vaccination on arrival, if appropriate.

Vaccines recommended specifically for travel are numerous, and include jabs for diverse illnesses such as hepatitis A and B, cholera, typhoid, polio and rabies. It is important to remember that destination is not the only factor to consider - required vaccinations vary widely depending on the time of year.

For example, Japanese encephalitis is present all year round in much of south-east Asia. However, in Vietnam the incidence peaks between May and October, while in Indonesia the risk is higher at the start of the rainy seasons in May and November. These complexities mean that up-to-date specialist resources such as Travax (a subscription service for health professionals at [travax.nhs.uk](http://travax.nhs.uk)) should be consulted for each patient to ensure accurate advice is given every time.

### Which vaccines are essential?

While some immunisations are strongly recommended before travel, few can be considered truly essential. Each person's circumstances and history should be considered when deciding whether to vaccinate, and the patient should be provided with all the information necessary to make an informed choice. For example, live vaccines are not usually recommended for pregnant women, and some vaccines may not be suitable for very young children or those with some medical conditions - particularly immune disorders. In these cases, it is wise to encourage the patient to give serious thought to whether they should actually travel, taking into account how common vaccine-preventable diseases are at the destination and the implications of illness.

Every rule has an exception, however, and there are a few vaccines that can sometimes be absolutely essential for travel. One example is yellow fever, which is a viral infection spread by mosquitoes in much of Africa and South America. The acute phase involves flu-like illness, but around one in seven people develop a more severe toxic phase disease after a short remission. This serious condition involves jaundice, bleeding of the mucus membranes and gastrointestinal tract, and renal impairment. It is fatal in roughly half of cases.

While vaccination is not always essential for entry to countries with endemic yellow fever, there are a number of countries that restrict entry for people who have recently visited an affected country or region. In these cases, entry will not be allowed unless travellers can provide a yellow fever vaccination certificate,

which is provided at the time of vaccination and can only be carried out at yellow fever vaccination centres. The certificate should be treated like a passport or other essential travel document, since losing it might have similar consequences. A searchable list of yellow fever vaccination centres is available from the National Travel Health Network and Centre (NaTHNaC) at [nathnac.org](http://nathnac.org).

Similarly, Saudi Arabia requires that people travelling for Umrah or Hajj pilgrimage (or visiting the Hajj area) must provide a certificate of vaccination with quadrivalent meningitis vaccine. Immunisation should take place at least 10 days before travel (but no more than three years before), and a visa will generally not be issued without a valid certificate. UK travellers to the region are also strongly recommended to make sure that their influenza, tetanus, MMR and polio vaccinations are up to date.

### Practical considerations

There are a number of practical issues to consider when advising on travel vaccinations. As with malaria prophylaxis, patients often do not realise that vaccines should be administered some time before travel in order to be most effective. For instance, cholera vaccination requires two doses to be given a week apart (or three doses over two weeks in children under six years), and the course should be completed a week before travel. Similarly, yellow fever certificates are not considered valid until 10 days after the initial vaccination. When patients do not have enough time to complete a whole course of vaccines, pharmacists should discuss the benefits of gaining some protection by starting a course, even if all doses cannot be administered.

For every patient considering travel to an area where vaccination is recommended, their first stop should be their own GP, who can check to see if their routine UK vaccinations (such as tetanus, for example) are up to date. Some GP surgeries will also offer travel vaccinations, but may charge to do so. Private travel clinics are also widely available, and run either in dedicated facilities or as part of pharmacies or GP surgeries. National networks such as MASTA (at [masta-travel-health.com](http://masta-travel-health.com)) provide clinics around the country, but local services are also easily found by searching online or in telephone directories.

GPs may offer some travel vaccinations free of charge, typically those that are either useful for life in the UK or protect against diseases that would present the greatest risk to public health if they were imported. Examples include tetanus, diphtheria, polio, typhoid and cholera. Other vaccines are likely to attract a charge.

Private travel clinics, by contrast, will charge for all vaccinations administered. Prices vary, but typically range from around £30 to £90 per vaccine. It is important to remember that ▶



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Not every disease can be vaccinated against, such as bacterial illness Lyme disease, which is spread by ticks

some vaccines require multiple doses so costs can mount up quickly, particularly if a whole family requires immunisation; travellers should budget for these charges carefully as part of the overall cost of their trip.

Travellers should also bear in mind that vaccines are not 100 per cent effective and that not every disease can be vaccinated against. Familiar illnesses such as norovirus and campylobacter are common all over the world, but there are more exotic risks as well. For example, Chikungunya fever is a widespread mosquito-borne viral illness in Africa and Asia, and causes an unpleasant flu-like illness that is generally self-limiting. In Europe and North America, ticks spread the bacterial illness Lyme disease, which can develop into a chronic disease with neurological symptoms.

All travellers should practice good food hygiene, and use reasonable measures to avoid insect bites. Malaria prophylaxis is also required in many parts of the world and can be a complex issue in its own right.

**Case study 1: Vaccination in pregnancy**

**PRESENTATION:** Tracey comes in to buy some insect repellent. She is excited because she is off to Malaysia with her husband for their last holiday before their baby is born in six months. You are immediately concerned. What questions do you need to ask and what advice should you give?

**COUNSELLING POINTS:** You ask Tracey about her travel and vaccination history and learn that she has never travelled outside of Europe before. She has not thought about vaccinations at all, but is up to date with tetanus boosters and had a full course of MMR as a child.

On checking the recommendations for Malaysia, you realise that both hepatitis A and typhoid vaccines are normally recommended. While hepatitis A immunisation can be given in pregnancy if clinically indicated, typhoid vaccination is more difficult. Although live

vaccines should usually be avoided in pregnancy, it has been suggested that the live oral typhoid vaccine might be preferred in pregnancy due to the more favourable side effect profile.

You explain to her that she needs to consider the risks of vaccinating versus the risks posed by hepatitis and typhoid and recommend that she speaks with her GP or midwife before proceeding. She cannot remember the name of the region they will be visiting, so you recommend she checks this urgently, since travel to areas with endemic malaria is strongly discouraged in pregnancy.

**Case study 2: A last-minute trip**

**PRESENTATION:** David asks to speak to the pharmacist about the vaccinations required for travel to west Africa. He will be spending a few weeks there, visiting cities and remote areas in several countries. It is a last-minute trip with no fixed itinerary and he is leaving in two days time. He thinks he might need malaria tablets and asks if there is anything else he should consider. What should you ask him and what does he need to know?

**COUNSELLING POINTS:** When you ask about travel history, David says that he has travelled extensively. He is up to date with hepatitis A and B, tetanus, cholera, meningitis, rabies and typhoid vaccinations. However, he has never been to any country where yellow fever is present. You explain that while he will be free to enter most areas with yellow fever, the illness is potentially very serious and he might be prevented from entering some countries if he does not have proof of vaccination.

You advise that while a yellow fever vaccination certificate will not be valid until 10 days after immunisation, it is better to have some protection from late vaccination than none at all. You recommend that he

practises good insect bite avoidance at all times, including regular use of an insect repellent containing DEET, wearing long sleeves and trousers (particularly at sunset and other times of high insect activity), and sleeping under a mosquito net impregnated with insect repellent. You also recommend that he attempts to work out which countries he will be likely to visit, in case he requires any additional vaccinations.

**Additional information**

Advice on travel health changes regularly, so to keep up to date pharmacists need to keep an eye on reputable sources:

- Travax ([travax.nhs.uk](http://travax.nhs.uk)) is an excellent resource for health professionals if your pharmacy is registered to use it.
- Fit for Travel ([fitfortravel.nhs.uk](http://fitfortravel.nhs.uk)) is equally good and suitable for signposting to the general public. It is a useful resource for patients to learn about disease risk and the vaccinations needed for specific destinations as well as a source of practical advice on malaria prophylaxis, bite avoidance and food hygiene.
- NHS Choices ([nhs.uk](http://nhs.uk)) also has excellent resources for the public on travel health, including information on which vaccines might be available free of charge from a GP.
- Finally, despite the best preparation sometimes things can go wrong. All travellers should ensure that they have adequate health insurance (plus a European Health Insurance Card for travel in Europe), and know who to call in an emergency. It is also wise to check the latest information from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for advice on current international safety risks. Up-to-date advice is available online from the [gov.uk](http://gov.uk) website at [gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice](http://gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice).

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### 5 minute test

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## Take the 5 Minute Test

1. People born before 1970 are usually immune to illnesses such as measles, mumps and rubella.

**True or false?**

2. Japanese encephalitis incidence peaks between October and February in Vietnam.

**True or false?**

3. Live vaccines may not be suitable for very young children or those with immune disorders.

**True or false?**

4. Toxic phase yellow fever is fatal in 75 per cent of cases.

**True or false?**

5. Some countries do not allow entry for people who have recently visited a yellow fever-affected region unless they have a vaccination certificate.

**True or false?**

6. Yellow fever certificates are not considered valid until 14 days after the initial vaccination.

**True or false?**

7. Saudi Arabia requires that people visiting the Hajj area must provide a certificate of vaccination with quadrivalent meningitis vaccine.

**True or false?**

8. Cholera vaccination requires two doses to be given a week apart.

**True or false?**

9. Vaccines to protect against norovirus and Chikungunya fever are recommended for travellers to some areas of Africa and Asia.

**True or false?**

10. Travel to areas with endemic malaria is strongly discouraged in pregnancy.

**True or false?**

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## Tips for your CPD entry on travel vaccinations

**Reflect** In which countries is Japanese encephalitis present? How long before travel should a yellow fever vaccination be carried out? Which vaccines are unsuitable for pregnant women?

**Plan** This article discusses vaccinations that may be required when travelling abroad. It includes information about the most commonly required travel vaccines, how long before travel they should be given and where patients can be vaccinated. Vaccination in pregnancy and the importance of the yellow fever vaccination are also considered.

**Act** Read the Update article and the suggested reading (below and right), then take the 5 Minute Test (above). Update and Update Plus subscribers can then access answers and a pre-filled CPD logsheet at [chemistanddruggist.co.uk/mycpd](http://chemistanddruggist.co.uk/mycpd).

Read about travel vaccinations on the NHS Choices website, which is a good resource to recommend to patients  
[tinyurl.com/vaccine20](http://tinyurl.com/vaccine20)

Find out more in-depth information about a wide range of travel vaccinations from the National Travel Health Network and Centre  
[tinyurl.com/vaccine21](http://tinyurl.com/vaccine21)

Find out more about the vaccines routinely given in the UK that most patients should have already had on the Fit For Travel website  
[tinyurl.com/vaccine24](http://tinyurl.com/vaccine24)

Read Update module 1743 *Staying safe on holiday* at [tinyurl.com/stay-safe-hols](http://tinyurl.com/stay-safe-hols) for information about hygiene measures to prevent holiday illnesses

**Evaluate** Do you know which vaccinations travellers to other countries may require? Could you advise pregnant women and last-minute travellers about the vaccination?

### EXPERT Q&A

Want to know more? Our expert is on hand to answer any further questions you may have on this month's topic. Email queries to: [asktheexpert@updateplus.co.uk](mailto:asktheexpert@updateplus.co.uk)

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