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Guidance for Relief Workers and Others Traveling to Haiti for Earthquake Response

This information is current as of today, January 15, 2010 at 09:11 EST

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This notice is to advise relief workers and other personnel traveling to Haiti to assist with the humanitarian response following the January 12 earthquake near Port-au-Prince. Conditions in the area remain hazardous, including extensive damage to buildings, roads, and other infrastructure.

Before you Depart for Haiti

Recommended Immunizations

- Routine: Be sure that you are up to date on vaccines such as measles/mumps/rubella (MMR), diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT), polio.
- Hepatitis A or immune globulin (IG): If your departure is imminent, one dose provides short-term protection.
- Typhoid: Injection may be preferable since oral requires a series of pills over several days.
- Hepatitis B: If your departure is imminent, one dose may provide some protection.

Key Items to Bring

- Due to shortages of food and water and extensive damage, be sure to have sufficient amounts of basic supplies, food, and water.
- Insect protection: insect repellent and a bednet
- Medications: antimalarial pills, medications for the treatment of travelers' diarrhea (e.g., loperamide and an antibiotic), personal prescriptions (including extras), any preferred over-the-counter medications
- Water purification tablets or a water purifier
- Personal protective equipment (PPE): (PDF)  boots, gloves, surgical masks
- Due to severe damage to health facilities and shortages of medical supplies, carry a first aid kit for your own protection.



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While in Haiti

Safe Food and water

- Drink bottled, boiled, or chemically treated water or carbonated beverages. Avoid tap water, fountain drinks, and ice cubes. See Water Disinfection for Travelers.
- Wash your hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand rub before you eat or prepare food.

Protection Against Insects and Animals

- Insect-borne diseases such as malaria and dengue are risks in Haiti. For detailed information about insect repellent use, see Protection Against Mosquitoes, Ticks, and Other Insects and Arthropods.
- Stay away from all animals. If you are bitten or scratched, wash the wound well with soap and water and seek medical care right away. See Rabies for information on appropriate treatment.

Infectious Diseases

- Malaria: Malaria is endemic in all of Haiti. Speak to your healthcare provider about appropriate medications and other precautions.
- HIV: Haiti has a high prevalence of HIV infection. Use universal precautions for exposure to blood and body fluids. To reduce the risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, always use latex condoms.
- Tuberculosis (TB): Rates of tuberculosis are very high in Haiti. If you feel that you have been exposed to tuberculosis while in Haiti, be sure to get tested when you return home.
- Anthrax: There are high rates of anthrax in Haiti. If you become ill when you return home, see a healthcare provider.

Injury

The risk of injury after an earthquake is high. Hazards such as electrocution from downed power lines and structural damage to buildings and roads all pose a risk.

- The majority of the road network in Haiti is not paved. Haiti is predominately mountainous and has extensive deforestation and soil erosion making travel over roadways especially hazardous. Exercise extreme care when traveling on roads particularly in rural areas.
- There has been extensive structural damage to buildings in Haiti. Avoid unstable structures if possible. Use personal protection equipment, such as hard hats and steel-toed boots if in areas with damaged buildings.



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Exposure to Human Remains

Human remains may contain blood-borne viruses and diarrhea-causing bacteria. Relief workers who are handling remains should take precautions to avoid being exposed to these organisms. Use masks and eye protection such as goggles to avoid exposure through splashes. Wear latex gloves to protect your hands.

Psychological/Emotional Difficulties

As a first responder or relief worker, you may encounter extremely stressful situations, such as tremendous loss of life, serious injuries, missing and separated families, and destruction of whole areas. It is important to recognize that these experiences may cause you psychological or emotional difficulties. To learn about mental health resources, see:

- [Mental Health in Aid Workers Fact Sheet](#)
- [Self-Care Tips for Stress](#)

After you come home

If you are not feeling well, you should see your doctor and mention that you have recently traveled to Haiti. Also tell your doctor if you were bitten or scratched by an animal while traveling.

Symptoms of malaria can develop up to one year after travel, so be alert for fever or flu-like symptoms.

Good luck and if you follow the above tips and suggestions you should be able to minimize the chances of bad things happening to you on your mission

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