

International Travel for Humanitarians

People who travel to provide humanitarian aid or disaster relief must first address their personal health and welfare, including knowledge and preparation for all the usual elements associated with travel to the area.

Health, Safety and Security

Personal illness or injury places a burden on the community the aid worker has traveled to support. Most sponsoring organizations give some health, safety and security training, but the ultimate responsibility rests with each individual.

- Injuries and accidents are a common risk for all travelers; be sensitive to your surroundings and carefully select the type of transportation and hour of travel, if possible.
- In disaster and emergency situations, be aware of physical hazards such as debris, unstable structures, downed power lines, environmental hazards and temperature extremes.
- Travelers to areas of conflict should be aware of potential dangers associated with combat.

Personal Items

Because of the loss of life, serious injuries, missing and separated families and destruction often associated with disasters, relief workers should recognize that situations they encounter may be extremely stressful. A personal item, such as a family photo, favorite music or religious material, can offer comfort in such situations. Checking in with family members and close friends is another means of support.

Important Documents

In uncertain circumstances, extra passport-style photos may be required for certain types of visas or for additional work permits. Travelers should bring photocopies of important documents, such as passports and credit cards, as well as copies of their medical or nursing license, if applicable. Medical information, such as immunization records and blood type, is helpful to have and is sometimes required. Carry these copies and also leave a copy with someone back home. In addition, carry contact information for whom to notify in an emergency.

Registration with Embassies

Travelers should register before departure with the U.S. Embassy in that country so that the local consulate is aware of their presence. This is important so that you are accounted for and included in evacuation plans as necessary. You may wish to consider supplemental health insurance to cover medical evacuation should you become ill or injured. Visit the U.S. Department of State website for additional information:

<https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/ui/>.

Significant risks for humanitarians:

Accidents and violence are documented risks for humanitarian workers and cause more deaths than disease and natural causes. Humanitarians should be mindful of the specific risks and situations listed below when traveling to provide aid.

- Exposure to the environment that precipitated or sustains a crisis or event, such as a natural disaster or conflict
- Working long hours under adverse or extreme conditions, often in close contact with the affected local population
- Damaged or absent local infrastructure, including availability of food, water, lodging, transportation and health services
- Reduced levels of security and protection

Travel Health Kit for Humanitarians

In addition to the items listed in the general international travel health kit, humanitarian workers should consider the additions listed below.

Toiletries

- Toothbrush/toothpaste
- Skin moisturizer
- Soap, shampoo
- Lip balm
- If corrective lenses are used:
 - Extra pair of prescription glasses in a protective case, copy of prescription
 - Eyeglass cleaning supplies and repair kit
 - Extra contact lenses and lens cleaner
- Razor, extra blades*
- Nail clippers*
- Toilet paper
- Menstrual supplies
- Sewing kit
- Laundry detergent
- Small clothesline/pins

Clothing

- Comfortable, light-weight clothing
- Long pants
- Long-sleeved shirts
- Hat
- Boots
- Shower shoes
- Rain gear
- Bandana/handkerchief
- Towel
- Gloves (leather gloves for physical labor; rubber gloves if handling blood or body fluids)

Safety and Security

- Money belt
- Cash
- Cell phone, equipped to work internationally, or satellite phone (with charger)
- Candles, matches, lighter in a ziplock bag*
- Ziplock bags
- Safety goggles

* Pack these items in checked baggage, since they may be considered sharp objects and confiscated by airport or airline security if packed in carry-on bags.

Contact a health-care provider

Regardless of the area of the world in which you will be deployed, you should discuss these basics with a health-care provider before travel:

- Routine vaccinations
- Malaria prophylaxis (if appropriate)
- Food and water precautions
- Self-treatment for travelers' diarrhea
- Risks from insect bites
- Injury prevention

Depending on the length of time away or your activities, returning aid workers may benefit from a complete medical review.

- Returning home has been identified as a risk period for difficulties in psychological adjustment
- Individuals who witnessed or have been involved in situations of mass casualties, deaths or serious injuries or who have been victims of violence should consider critical incident counseling

Activities of Daily Living

- Sunglasses
- Waterproof watch
- Flashlight
- Spare batteries
- Travel plug adapters for electronics
- Multi-purpose knife*
- If traveling to an area where food or water may be contaminated:
 - Bottled water or water filters/purification system/water purification tablets
 - Nonperishable food items



For more information on international travel health, visit www.cdc.gov/travel.

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