



CRUISE SHIP TRAVEL

To ensure the best possible cruise experience for yourself, it is important to be prepared for cruise ship travel and to know how to prevent illness, especially if you are elderly or have a pre-existing medical condition. Be sure to discuss your travel plans with the Travel Health department well before the time of departure.

PRE-EXISTING CONDITIONS

If you have a pre-existing medical condition or are recovering from a recent health problem, contact the cruise lines medical department prior to travel and verify that they have the staff and equipment you may need. If you are disabled or have trouble walking, you should inquire into the availability of assistance for embarking and disembarking, since not all ports have the necessary equipment. If you are taking medications, be sure to bring an adequate supply with you and provide the ship physician with a list of all current medications and dosages.

CONTAGIOUS HEALTH RISKS

Influenza outbreaks may occur onboard cruise ships, where large numbers of people co-exist in relatively confined spaces and are in close contact with other passengers. This helps spread respiratory infections such as influenza ("flu"). If you are elderly or otherwise at risk from respiratory illness, influenza can lead to serious complications including pneumonia, hospitalization, and even death.

It is also important to know that you may be traveling with passengers from different parts of the world and therefore could be exposed to flu virus at any time of the year, not just during "flu season" in your home area. **All passengers, especially the elderly and those with pre-existing medical conditions, should be vaccinated against influenza before traveling.**

"Norwalk-like" Virus Infections are a very common gastrointestinal virus. Symptoms can include vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal cramps, and low fever. The virus is highly contagious and can be transmitted through improper hygiene, from person-to-person, via contaminated food or water, through contact with contaminated surfaces, or even through particles in the air. To prevent the spread of the virus, passengers who become ill are sometimes asked to stay in their cabins and may be asked to leave the ship at the next port. Frequent hand washing (every 1-2 hours) helps reduce the spread of the virus.

Legionnaires Disease is a flu-like illness acquired from water systems. Outbreaks of the disease have occurred on cruise vessels due to poor cleaning and maintenance practices of spas, fountains, and showers. However, risk is considered low.

OTHER HAZARDS

Skin Problems, including infections and sunburn are common problems during cruise travel. To help reduce the chance of skin infections, you should thoroughly wash cuts, abrasions, and insect bites with soap and water. Avoid excessive sun exposure and use sunscreen to prevent sunburn.

Dengue Fever is caused by the bite of an infected mosquito. A number of cruise ships visit ports in countries where dengue is endemic. Insect precautions are the only preventative measure available,

since there is no vaccine at this time. While rarely fatal, it is uncomfortable, with symptoms of high fever and joint pain.

Malaria is also caused by the bite of an infected mosquito. Cruise lines commonly offer day trips to local destinations where malaria is endemic, with passengers returning to the ship in the evening. In this situation, **medication to prevent malaria is generally not needed**, because you will be on the ship during the evening and at night, when the mosquitoes that carry malaria are most apt to bite and the risk of acquiring malaria is highest.

- ✚ Before traveling, you should discuss, with a nurse in Travel Health, any recommendations for insect precautions and preventive malaria medications.
- ✚ If you experience a fever while still on board the cruise ship, report it immediately to the ship's medical department.

Travelers Diarrhea is not usually contracted on the cruise ship (except diarrhea caused by the Norwalk-like virus) but is more common when passengers eat at restaurants while in port. Diarrhea can occur 24 to 48 hours after you are exposed. Before you travel, ask Travel Health for advice on preventing and dealing with diarrhea in the event that you do become sick.

Motion Sickness is less likely on large modern ships which have been engineered to reduce motion sickness. For more information, see the handout on "*Motion Sickness.*"

VACCINATIONS

Yellow Fever Cruise ports in countries where yellow fever is endemic do not require yellow fever immunization, with one exception: if you are taking a cruise tour up the Amazon River, you should be vaccinated. In the past, some passengers who were not vaccinated have contracted yellow fever on these cruises. One dose of yellow fever vaccine is given, and is effective to 10 years.

Hepatitis A This infection is not usually a risk to passengers on cruise ships. However, if you intend to eat at local restaurants while in port, you should be vaccinated against hepatitis A virus before you travel. Two doses of hepatitis A vaccine are given, 6 to 12 months apart.

Pneumococcal Disease If you are age 65 or older, or have a pre-existing illness that might make you vulnerable to pneumococcal disease, you should be immunized prior to travel. One dose of the vaccine is given.

Other routine vaccines Check with your regular provider to ensure that you are up to date on all routine vaccines for your age and health condition.

KAISER PERMANENTE.  thrive

