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# Yellow fever

INFORMATION FOR TRAVELLERS

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## What is yellow fever?

Yellow fever (YF) is a serious illness caused by the YF virus. YF is usually passed on to humans by the bite of an infected mosquito. YF can vary from a flu-like illness that gets better on its own over several days to a severe illness with fever, jaundice (turning yellow), bleeding and organ failure.

There is no specific medicine to treat YF. Most people with the disease will need to be admitted to hospital and treated for their symptoms, some in intensive care. Many people who get YF will die from the disease.

## Where does yellow fever occur?

YF occurs in some tropical parts of South America and sub Saharan Africa. Although most cases occur in the countryside, YF can also occur in cities. It is estimated that there are around 200,000 cases of YF in risk areas each year, although it is likely that many more cases occur but do not get reported. Most cases occur in Africa.

## How can I prevent yellow fever?

**There are two ways to prevent YF:**

- ▶ Prevent mosquito bites.
- ▶ Get the YF vaccine.

Travellers to YF areas should do both things.

### Mosquito bites

Mosquitoes that transmit YF tend to bite during the daytime, particularly in the hours after dawn and before dusk. If visiting a YF risk area, you are advised to prevent mosquito bites day and night.

### Ways of preventing bites are:

- ▶ Cover-up as much as possible with loose-fitting, lightweight clothing.
- ▶ Apply insect repellents, ideally containing 30-50% DEET, to exposed areas of skin.
- ▶ Apply an insecticide such as permethrin to clothing, which will kill mosquitoes on contact.

Permethrin should not be used directly on the skin. More detailed information about avoiding mosquito bites can be found on the TravelHealthPro website:

- ▶ <http://travelhealthpro.org.uk/factsheet/38/insect-and-tick-bite-avoidance>

### Vaccination

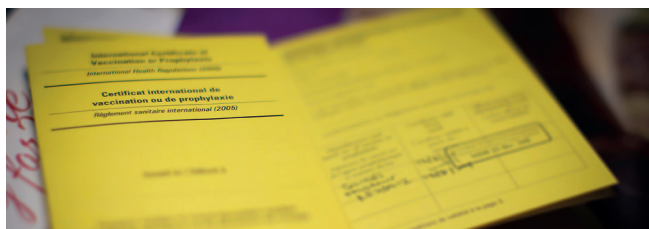
If you are having the YF vaccine for the first time, you should have it at least 10 days before you travel. For most travellers, the vaccine is expected to provide life-long protection. Rarely, travellers are advised to have a further dose; a health professional at a Yellow Fever Vaccination Centre (YFVC) can tell you if this applies to you.

## Yellow fever vaccine

The vaccine that protects against YF has been used for more than 70 years. It works very well and lasts for a long period of time. Most people do not have any problems with the vaccine. Vaccination can only be given in approved YFVC. Your local GP may be a YFVC, but if not, you can find a YFVC in the UK by searching on the NaTHNaC YF Zone website:

- ▶ [www.nathnacyfzone.org.uk/search-centres](http://www.nathnacyfzone.org.uk/search-centres)

If you are having YF vaccine for the first time, it must be given 10 days or more before your trip to be effective and to be officially accepted by the country to



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The ICVP is an  
official record  
of vaccination  
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which you are travelling. Travellers who are leaving in less than 10 days should discuss with their YFVC whether to get YF vaccine. At the time you are given your YF vaccine, you will also be given an International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis (ICVP); you should carry your ICVP with you during travel. It is an official record of your vaccination and may be requested by immigration officials.

As of 11 July 2016, the ICVP is valid for the life of the person vaccinated [existing ICVP written on any date before 11 July 2016, will be accepted as valid for life, and should not be altered in any way].

## Who should get yellow fever vaccine?

**In general, there are two situations where travellers should be vaccinated against YF:**

- ▶ **Travel to countries that require vaccination as a condition for entry.**
- ▶ **Travel to countries where there is a risk of getting YF.**

Your YFVC will be able to advise you whether or not YF vaccination is appropriate for your trip. You should still get advice from a YFVC even if you have received information about YF vaccine from your travel agent.

## Who should not get yellow fever vaccine?

- ▶ **Anyone with a severe allergy to eggs, or to a previous dose of YF vaccine.**
- ▶ **Children younger than 9 months old.**  
Rarely, children 6 to 8 months old may be vaccinated.
- ▶ **People whose immune system is affected because of a disease or treatment for a disease.**
- ▶ **People with a disorder of their thymus gland.**

You should discuss with your YFVC any concerns about your health and if you should get the vaccine. You should still seek advice if any of the above applies and you must travel to a YF risk area.

## What if I cannot get a yellow fever vaccine?

Travellers who cannot have the vaccine should consider if they need to travel to a YF risk destination. Where proof of vaccination is required by the country to be visited, but you are not able to have the vaccine because of medical reasons, a Medical Letter of Exemption from vaccination may be written by a health professional. This may be taken into account by immigration authorities. As the risk of YF remains, travellers should take care to avoid mosquito bites.

## What are the risks from yellow fever vaccine?

**YF vaccine is well tolerated by most people. If there are reactions they are usually mild and can consist of:**

- ▶ **Soreness at the injection site**
- ▶ **Headaches and muscle aches**
- ▶ **Low-grade fever**

These reactions will occur in up to 30% of people, begin shortly after the vaccine is given and can last for several days. There are also very rare reactions following vaccination.

### **These consist of three types:**

- ▶ **Severe allergic reactions (anaphylaxis) usually occurring in people who are allergic to eggs.** This happens about once in every 50,000 to 125,000 people who receive the vaccine.
- ▶ **Severe nervous system reactions such as meningitis or brain inflammation.** This happens about once to twice in every 250,000 people who receive the vaccine.
- ▶ **Severe reaction involving several body organs such as the liver, lung, and kidneys.** This happens about once in every 250,000 people who receive the vaccine. This reaction has symptoms similar to YF disease.

Almost all cases of the nervous system and multiple organ reactions have occurred only in people who have received YF vaccine for the first time. There is a higher risk for these two reactions in those who are aged 60 years and older, and in this group, the reactions happen about once in every 50,000 people who receive the vaccine.

## What should I do about any potential risks from the vaccine?

Before you receive the vaccine you should thoroughly discuss the indications for the vaccine and be honest about your medical history. Your GP or nurse can then advise whether it is appropriate for you to have the vaccine. After you get the vaccine you should monitor your health over the next month and report any problems to your YFVC or your GP.

## Where can I get more information about yellow fever and yellow fever vaccine?

NaTHNaC's TravelHealthPro website contains free travel health resources for both health professionals advising travellers and for travellers.

[www.travelhealthpro.org.uk](http://www.travelhealthpro.org.uk)

