HEALTH GUIDELINES & REQUIREMENTS



South Africa: Multiculturalism and Human Rights

SIT SCHOOL FOR INTERNATIONAL TRAINING
STUDY ABROAD

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BRIEF SUMMARY

Prior to Departure:

- Schedule an appointment with your primary care doctor or a travel medicine clinic at least 8 weeks prior to departure.
- Take an adequate quantity of all your necessary and prescription medications to last your entire stay.
- Ensure you are up to date on all routine vaccines. An annual flu shot and covid vaccine is recommended if available.
- Discuss your specific travel itinerary (including various in-country locations you plan to visit) with your physician and discuss:
    - Recommended vaccines including but not limited to: rabies, typhoid, TDaP booster.
    - Prevention and treatment of traveler's diarrhea.

While you are in South Africa:

- Take measures to prevent traveler's diarrhea.
- Take preventive measures to avoid mosquito bites.
- Do not travel alone and maintain an awareness of your surroundings at all times. Keep in mind that South Africa has one of the highest rates of sexual assaults in the world.
- Remember motor vehicle accidents remain the biggest risk for international travelers. Ride in the back seat, wear seatbelts, and do not be afraid to ask your driver to slow down.
- Use condoms if you are sexually active.
- While traveling abroad, minimize high-risk behaviors.
- Notify your Academic Director if you become ill.

GENERAL INFORMATION

To protect your health in South Africa, you need certain pre-departure immunizations followed by reasonable health precautions while in the country. The following health guidelines and requirements are based on years of experience and the current recommendations from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. They are designed to inform you of health concerns that may be present in South Africa especially as you venture to smaller cities off the usual tourist track, or spend time in small villages and rural areas for extended periods. Although no information sheet can address every conceivable contingency, the following health guidelines and requirements are an attempt to provide you with a standard, which if followed, should optimize good health during your stay abroad.

You may find that local customs and practice, as well as varying US physicians' approaches, at times conflict with these guidelines. It is essential that you review these health guidelines and requirements with your physician, to discuss individual issues such as pre-existing medical problems and allergies to specific drugs. Any further questions or concerns should be directed to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (www.cdc.gov/travel) or to your own physician.



SIT Study Abroad programs may venture off the usual tourist track. Pay careful attention to health and safety guidelines.

PREVENTION OF INSECT-BORNE ILLNESS

Malaria

Since malaria is not endemic to Durban, where the program is based and other areas to which you will be traveling such as Johannesburg or Cape Town prophylaxis is not required there. However, while malaria is not common in South Africa, it does occur in certain locations including the northern KwaZulu Natal area where the program will be visiting for approximately 10 nights in a low risk area. There will also be a 5-day excursion to Swaziland and Mozambique-a medium to high risk area. For full protection you should take your ***first*** pill before any travel to these areas.

CDC guidelines suggest that prevention of malaria is possible if you carefully follow personal protective measures as described below and take one of the following antimalarial drugs (listed alphabetically) as directed by your health care provider: atovaquone/proguanil (Malarone), doxycycline, mefloquine, or tafenoquine (Arakoda). **The selection should be discussed with your physician or health-care provider.** If, in spite of adherence to these preventive measures, you develop symptoms of malaria, prompt medical attention lessens the severity of the illness.

Personal Protective Measures

The following insect precautions should be followed, especially after dark, to prevent mosquito bites that may transmit malaria:

- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
- Use insect repellents on bedding and netting. (e.g. permethrin – commonly known as Permanone).
- Use insect repellents on skin and clothing. DEET-containing products (e.g. Off, Off Deep Woods, Jungle Juice, and Muskol) may be used on skin in concentrations up to 30–40% and on clothing in higher concentrations. Permethrin (Permanone) may also be used on clothing.

SIT Study Abroad suggests that if you have further questions, do not hesitate to contact the Malarial Division of CDC at 888-232-3228 for recorded information or visit the CDC website: http://www.cdc.gov/malaria/travelers/index.html

Chikungunya

Chikungunya is an arboviral infection that is transmitted by day-biting *Aedes* mosquitoes. It is prevalent in tropical Africa and Asia, parts of Central and South America, and the Caribbean. Low risk exists in South Africa. Symptoms are typically fever and joint pain. There is no licensed vaccine against it, but insect precautions and personal protective measures (especially during peak times (early morning and late afternoon) are the main prevention strategy.

PREVENTION OF FOOD- AND WATER-BORNE ILLNESSES



The South Africa Department of Tourism report that "it is safe to drink and cook with water when taken from the taps in urban areas as well as to eat fresh fruits, vegetables, and salads and to put ice in your drinks. Food and water safety however, cannot be guaranteed from street food purchases and not all tap water in rural areas is safe for consumption".

If you are unsure of the food and water quality in the area you are visiting, check with a reliable source before using. If in any doubt, and for visits to rural areas, take all the recommended precautions and follow certain do's and don'ts:

DO WASH your hands scrupulously with non-contaminated water and soap before eating and snacking.

DO DRINK

- Bottled or canned beverages (water, soda, soft drinks, beer, wine) from a trusted source (ensure caps are sealed).
- Hot coffee, tea.
- Water that has reached a rolling boil for at least one minute at sea level (longer at higher altitudes).

DO USE

- Commercial iodide or tinctured liquid iodine to treat water, ONLY if bottled water (from a trusted source) is not available and boiling water is not possible. Chlorine in various forms is less reliable than iodine. These provide substantial protection when added to tap water.

DO EAT

- Cooked vegetables, fruits with thick covering (citrus, bananas, and melons); and well-washed raw fruits and vegetables.
- Meat or fish that is thoroughly cooked (pork and lamb should be very well done).
- Pasteurized dairy products.

DON'T EAT

- Unwashed or unpeeled raw fruits and vegetables.
- Fruits that do not have a thick, disposable outside covering.
- Rare or raw meat, fish, or shellfish.
- Dairy products from small, independent vendors without pasteurizing facilities, including food of any kind that has been left out in the sun, especially custards, creams, and mayonnaise.
- Raw (unpasteurized) milk or milk products. Tuberculosis and brucellosis, both serious diseases are transmitted in this way, so the consumption of unpasteurized milk and milk products should be strictly avoided.

There may be times when refusing an offer of food or beverage, even a drink with ice or avoiding a salad will be considered rude. You must decide for yourself, but polite refusals, thought out in advance, are often handy. Discuss these alternatives with your Academic Director(s).

Diarrhea-Producing Infections

"Traveler's diarrhea" is the most common form of diarrhea in South Africa. This is a self-limited diarrhea lasting from a few to several days, characterized by watery, non-bloody bowel movements. Traveler's diarrhea usually requires no treatment other than fluid replacement including ORS (the World Health Organization's oral rehydration solution which comes in package form) or other homemade solutions such as 1 teaspoon salt, 1/2 teaspoon baking soda, and 2–3 tablespoons sugar or honey in 1 liter of **clean** water; or carbonated soda diluted by one half. Antidiarrheals such as Imodium or Lomotil may be used short-term in some circumstances. Pepto Bismol in large amounts and certain antibiotics (doxycycline, sulfa-TMP, ciprofloxacin) can prevent or attenuate the infection. Antibiotics may be indicated for more severe cases of traveler's diarrhea.

Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is a highly contagious virus that causes liver inflammation. It is most commonly spread through contaminated food and water. Most Americans have not previously been exposed to the hepatitis A virus and are at risk of contracting the disease during travel to areas where the disease is more prevalent. A very effective vaccine is available and should be administered 2–3 weeks prior to travel.

Schistosomiasis (Bilharzia)

Schistosomiasis is present in South Africa in the far northeastern and eastern coastal regions including untreated water around game parks. The Peace Corps lists it as one of the country's major medical illness. It is acquired by contact with fluke-like parasites, which live in fresh-water snail hosts and can penetrate the skin of people and animals, causing serious problems. There is at present no chemoprophylaxis or immunization for this, but it can be avoided by following these guidelines:

- **DO NOT SWIM OR WADE IN FRESH WATER.**
- Heat bathing water to 50°C (122°F) for 5 minutes (if using untreated water that comes directly from a freshwater source such as

canals, lakes, rivers, streams or springs). This will destroy the parasites. Iodine treatment alone *will not guarantee* that water is safe and free of all parasites.
- Filter untreated water with a tightly woven cloth or with paper filters. This may also be effective in removing the parasites from untreated bathing water. If these measures are not feasible, allow untreated bathing water to stand for 3 days, since the parasites live only 48 hours.
- Properly chlorinated water that is piped into homes, chlorinated pools and salt water are generally safe from infectious diseases.
- If accidental exposure to suspected water occurs, immediate and vigorous towel drying or rapid application of rubbing alcohol to exposed areas may reduce the risk of infection.

If you suspect that you are infected, contact a doctor or hospital *immediately* and obtain urine and stool tests. If you do test positive, praziquantel is the treatment of choice.

Typhoid Fever

Typhoid is an infection caused by a particular species of the salmonella bacterium. It is spread by contaminated food and water. Symptoms include fever, severe toxicity, rash, and in about half the cases, bloody diarrhea. Untreated, there is a 30% mortality rate. Vaccines are 60–70% effective in prevention. One vaccine involves a single injection, with immunity lasting 2 years. A second one is administered orally every other day for 4 doses, and lasts 5 years. Antibiotic resistance has been developing, but treatment of the disease with certain well-known antibiotics is usually effective. As with all diarrheal illnesses, careful dietary discretion continues to be the main line of defense.

OTHER DISEASES

Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is a serious and often chronic viral infection of the liver. Since this type of hepatitis is most often acquired from contact with infected blood, sexual contact (as with HIV), or skin-to-skin contact of mutual open cuts and sores, appropriate precautions to avoid these types of exposure are necessary. This includes avoiding getting tattoos, or ear/body piercings and avoiding cuddling children with sores or draining insect bites. A series of three immunizing injections is recommended. This series should be initiated as early as possible so that at least two doses are taken prior to departure. This will provide partial protection. The third shot should be taken five months after the second dose, and may be given after returning home to achieve full, long-lasting immunity. An accelerated schedule can also be used as an alternative.

HIV/AIDS and Blood Supplies

HIV/AIDS is a concern worldwide. The HIV virus is transmitted by way of bodily fluids from an infected person. HIV is spread mainly by having anal or vaginal sex or sharing drug injection equipment with a person who has HIV. AIDS is an acquired immune deficiency that can result in life- threatening infections and is the most advanced stage of the HIV infection. It is the student's responsibility to protect him /herself from acquiring the disease through sexual transmission. Students anticipating even the possibility of sexual activity are strongly urged to bring their own condom supply. Other potential routes of infected blood transmission such as tattooing, body piercing and needle sharing must be strictly avoided.

With regard to blood transfusions, our Academic Directors have identified hospitals, through consultation with the local US embassy, where ‘‘safe’’ blood is available. In a life-threatening situation, the risks versus benefits of an emergency blood transfusion must be examined carefully and a decision made based on the best information available at the time.

Rabies

Rabies is a viral disease almost always caused by animal bites (especially dogs, jackal, mongoose, and fox bites). Risk occurs in South Africa and, therefore, you should take measures to prevent it. Given the serious danger posed by rabies as a uniformly fatal disease, follow these important guidelines:

- Consider pre-exposure immunization (if available).
- Avoid bites from all animals and especially avoid handling or feeding puppies, kittens, monkeys,

or other animals. They can have rabies before it is obvious.

- If you have been bitten or have had direct contact with the saliva of a suspected rabid animal, immediately wash the affected area with a soap solution and running water thoroughly to neutralize and to rinse out the virus. ***Then proceed immediately for post-exposure treatment***.
- If possible, the animal should be captured and kept under cautious surveillance until the diagnosis and therapy are completed. If capture is not possible, a clear description of the animal and the circumstance of contact should be carefully recorded.

Tuberculosis

Tuberculosis (TB) is a bacterial disease spread by airborne droplets from a person with untreated pulmonary TB or by ingestion of TB-contaminated unpasteurized milk products. Transmission is more likely in conditions of crowding and poverty. A TB skin test can indicate prior exposure to tuberculosis and is recommended prior to travel (unless already known to be positive). A repeat test is also recommended after returning to the US even if the pre-departure test was negative.

Coronavirus COVID-19

COVID-19 is a newly identified respiratory virus that is spread through direct contact with an infected person as well as through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared this disease a global pandemic for the worldwide spread of a new disease for which most people do not have immunity. Symptoms of COVID-19 may appear **2-14 days after exposure** and may include fever, cough, and shortness of breath. The illness can also cause muscle or body aches, sore throat, vomiting and diarrhea. Reported illnesses have ranged from mild symptoms to severe illness and death for confirmed coronavirus disease (COVID-19) cases. *There is currently a vaccine to protect against the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). CDC states that a person is considered fully vaccinated two weeks after receiving the last recommended dose of vaccine.* The best way to protect yourself is to obtain the COVID 19 vaccine (if available) and to continue to follow COVID 19 precautions!

- **Clean your hands often-**wash your hands carefully and frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds especially after you have been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- **Cover your mouth and nose** with a tissue when you cough or sneeze or use the inside of your elbow. Throw used tissues in the trash.
- **Clean AND disinfect** frequently touched surfaces daily. This includes tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, and sinks.
- **Avoid close contact. Practice physical distancing-**stay at least 6 feet apart. Put distance between yourself and other people if possible.
- **Inform your Academic Director immediately** if you have a pulmonary disease or any respiratory illness; have a fever or feeling sick; if you have been in close contact with a person known to have COVID-19; and/or have recently traveled from an area with widespread or ongoing community spread of COVID-19.
- **Contact ISOS and a medical doctor,** if you develop symptoms.
- **Avoid travel if you are sick or have a fever.** Your Academic Director will make appropriate accommodations for students who are ill.
- **Wear a facemask**, especially when you are around other people (e.g., sharing a room or vehicle) and before you enter a healthcare provider's office.
- **Most importantly, stay connected:** especially during your Independent Study Project or Internship. Communicate daily with your SIT Academic Director. SIT continues to update its contingency and evacuation plans to ensure that we are prepared to take appropriate action in the event of a change in circumstances.

SIT recommends that students check the country's consular website for up-to-date information on entry and exit requirements.

Sun Exposure

SIT Study Abroad recommends the use of sunglasses, wide-brimmed hats, sunscreen lotions, and lip protection to reduce problems related to sun exposure.

Air Quality

Students with a history of asthma or allergies should be warned that air pollution in South Africa is steadily worsening, resulting in an increasing incidence of respiratory illness. Asthmatics should carry emergency medicines for severe asthma attacks.

IMMUNIZATIONS FOR SOUTH AFRICA

Immunizations are recommended to protect *your* health and well-being by building up your immune defenses against specific prevalent diseases. Plan ahead at least 8 weeks, since some immunizations require more than one dose for effectiveness. *SIT recommends that you bring a copy of your immunization record with you and insert this document in your passport so that it is easily accessible.*

REQUIRED (for participation in program):

- ***COVID 19:*** Immunity is provided against COVID 19 disease two weeks after being fully vaccinated.

RECOMMENDED (as a health precaution- consult your physician):

- ***MMR (measles, mumps, rubella)*****:** Two (2) doses of live measles vaccine are recommended.
- ***Tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis*****:** The primary child series is recommended. Boosters (Td or Tdap) are effective for 10 years. If you are uncertain when you had your last injection, we recommend that you get another booster.
- ***Varicella (chicken pox):*** you should have received the vaccine or have documentation of having chicken pox.
- ***Hepatitis A*****:** Hepatitis A vaccine, which provides long-term immunity, is recommended.
- ***Hepatitis B*****:** A series of 3 immunization injections is recommended. See section on Hepatitis B.
- ***Influenza*****:** Influenza vaccine should be considered for any individual wishing to decrease risk of influenza or non-specific respiratory illness especially those who are at high risk for complications from influenza including those with asthma, COPD, diabetes, chronic cardiovascular disease and immunocompromised conditions.
- ***Rabies*****:** Follow carefully the special instructions in the section on rabies.
- ***Typhoid*****:** This vaccine is urged as a viable protective measure. The vaccine is given either orally or by injection. Discuss the relative merits of each with your doctor.

With reasonable attention to health and hygiene rules, your stay in South Africa should be a healthy one. Aside from minor ailments due to adjustments to the new food, water and climate, the large majority of SIT Study Abroad students remain healthy throughout their semester. We do, however, recommend that you see your physician when you return to the US to test for any possible lingering infection contracted overseas.

Take good care of yourself!

