South Africa: Social and Political Transformation

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 particular drugs. Any further questions or concerns should be directed to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta (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 2 weeks in a low risk area, and returning for 4 days to the high risk Swaziland area. Malaria is also endemic to Mozambique - an excursion destination. 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, or mefloquine. 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 mosquito netting over bedding.
- 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 (www.cdc.gov/travel/diseases.htm#malaria)

**Dengue:** This is a viral disease and is transmitted by mosquitoes which bite primarily in the daytime. It presents low risk in Maputo, Mozambique. There is no licensed vaccine against it, but personal protective measures against mosquito bites are effective in prevention (see under malaria section). The disease causes considerable discomfort (fever, body aching), but is self-limited in adults in most cases.

**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. 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 Illness**
The South Africa Department of Tourism reports 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. For travel to rural areas and excursion destinations, take all the recommended precautions and respect 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 beverages (coffee, tea).
- Water that has reached a rolling boil for at least one minute at sea level (longer at higher altitudes).
- Carbonated mineral water.

**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 from large commercial dairies.
DON'T EAT

- Unwashed or unpeeled raw fruits and vegetables.
- Fruits that do not have a thick, disposable outside covering.
- Rare or raw meat or 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. Fluid replacement for more severe diarrhea could require up to 3–4 liters initially over 2–6 hours, followed by 8–12 ounces for each subsequent loose stool. 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 are 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 problems. It is acquired by contact with fluke-like parasites, which live in freshwater snail hosts and can penetrate the skin of people and animals, causing serious illness. 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.
**Cholera**: Cholera is an acute intestinal infection caused by a bacterium (vibrio cholerae). It is usually mild and self-limited but can be associated with severe, profuse watery diarrhea requiring medical attention for fluid replacement. The guidelines for preventing diarrheal infections apply to preventing cholera as well including strict food and beverage precautions and hygiene measures. The cholera vaccine is not presently available in the United States, and is not recommended.

**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.

**AIDS and blood supplies**: AIDS is a concern worldwide. AIDS is an acquired immune deficiency that can result in life-threatening infections. The HIV virus is transmitted by way of bodily fluids from an infected person. Abstinence is the surest way to prevent contracting the disease via sexual transmission. It is the student’s responsibility to protect him/herself from acquiring the disease through sexual transmission. Condoms are generally available abroad but may not be of good quality. 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 at hand.

**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.** The sooner the better; depending on the location of the bite, you may have little time.
- If at all 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 required prior to travel (unless already known to be positive). A repeat test is recommended after returning to the US even if the pre-departure test was negative.

**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 fall under two categories: 1) those that are required for SIT Study Abroad admission and 2) those that are recommended to protect your health and well-being by building up your immune defenses against
specific prevalent diseases. In addition, certain basic immunizations are required by US law.

Plan ahead at least 8 weeks, as laid out in the sample schedule at the end of these instructions, since some immunizations require more than one dose for effectiveness. The physician administering the inoculations should record all immunizations on the International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis (ICVP, also known as the WHO card). The WHO card should be kept with you at all times while in the host country.

REQUIRED
• **MMR (measles, mumps, rubella):** You will need to be immunized if you have not had 2 doses of live measles vaccine.

• **Tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis:** The primary child series is required. 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 and enter it on your WHO card.

RECOMMENDED
• **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.

### Sample Immunization Schedule for South Africa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before the start of program</th>
<th>Immunizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8 weeks</td>
<td>First rabies pre-exposure (Imovax, RabAvert)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 weeks</td>
<td>Second rabies Tetanus (Td, Tdap); Influenza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 weeks</td>
<td>Typhoid (injection or oral) Third rabies</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 weeks</td>
<td>Hepatitis A vaccine</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 week (before entering a malaria zone)</td>
<td>Start weekly malaria prophylaxis, (if using mefloquine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 days (before entering a malaria zone)</td>
<td>Start daily dose of malaria prophylaxis (if using doxycycline or Malarone)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

To assist your planning, we suggest the above schedule for required and recommended immunizations. For your own comfort and protection, do not leave shots to the last minute!

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!**