HEALTH GUIDELINES

& REQUIREMENTS

Australia: Rainforest, Reef, and Cultural Ecology
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*SIT Study Abroad programs may venture off the usual tourist track. Pay careful attention to health and safety guidelines.*

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

To protect your health in Australia, 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. It is designed to inform you of health concerns that may be present in Australia especially as you venture to smaller cities off the usual tourist track, or spend time in small villages and rural areas for extended periods.

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, particularly in order 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) in Atlanta ([http://www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel)) or to your own physician.

**PREVENTION OF INSECT-BORNE ILLNESSES**

**Dengue**

Dengue is a viral disease and is transmitted by mosquitoes which bite primarily in the daytime. Low risk exists in northern Queensland, including the urban areas of Cairns and Townsville. There is no licensed vaccine against it, but personal protective measures against mosquito bites are effective in prevention. Insect repellents, protective clothing such as long-sleeved shirts and pants, plus the use of permethrin-treated mosquito netting are therefore essential. The disease causes considerable discomfort (fever, body aching), but is self-limited in adults.

**Arbovirus Illnesses**

These illnesses are caused by a virus transmitted by mosquitoes. Although arbovirus infections are often mild, they can also be serious causing encephalitis—an inflammation of the brain manifested by alterations in mental awareness and functioning. The most common arbovirus illness in Australia is **Ross River fever**. Transmission occurs throughout the year with highest activity between February and May when mosquitoes are most abundant. Most people become unwell within 3–11 days after being bitten by an infectious mosquito. Symptoms include fever, rash, joint pain and joint swelling especially of the fingers, wrists and feet. Lethargy and fatigue are often debilitating and are frequently accompanied by nausea, headache and/or backache. Usually the symptoms disappear within 6 weeks; however 10% of infected persons have ongoing symptoms that may last for months. Clearly prevention is the best strategy. Insect precautions are highly recommended (see above).
PREVENTION OF FOOD- AND WATER-BORNE ILLNESSES

There is minimal risk throughout the country of contracting food- and water-borne illness. Food and water standards are similar to those in the United States. Tap water is suitable for drinking.

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

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, or sexual contact (as with HIV), or from skin-to-skin contact of mutual open cuts and sores, appropriate precautions to avoid these types of exposure are necessary. This includes avoiding tattooing, ear/body piercing, and cuddling children with sores and 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 at hand.

Coronavirus COVID-19
COVID-19 is a newly identified respiratory virus that was discovered in China. Cases of the virus have spread rapidly in China and have also been reported in over 100 other countries, including the United States. 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. COVID-19 is usually spread through direct contact with an infected person as well as through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It is unknown if the virus can spread from contact with contaminated surfaces or objects. Symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, cough, and shortness of breath, and may appear 2-14 days after exposure. The illness can also cause body aches, sore throat, vomiting and diarrhea. Reported illnesses have ranged from mild symptoms to severe illness and death for confirmed coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) cases.
There is currently no vaccine to prevent coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus and protect yourself!

- **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 social distancing.** 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.

**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.

**IMMUNIZATIONS**

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.

In the case of Australia, no immunizations are required for entry into the country from the US, or into the US from Australia. However, several are strongly recommended to protect your own health, or may even be required if you are visiting other countries just before or after visiting Australia. Plan ahead at least 7 weeks, as laid out in the 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. **If for some reason you are unable to obtain a WHO card or your WHO card is lost it will be sufficient to carry a copy of your immunization record with you.**

**REQUIRED (for participation in program):**

- **MMR (Measles, Mumps, Rubella):** You will need to be immunized if you have not had 2 doses of live measles vaccine.
- **Tetanus, Diphtheria, and 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.
RECOMMENDED (as a health precaution - consult your physician):

- **Hepatitis A**: Hepatitis A vaccine, which provides long-term immunity, is recommended.

- **Hepatitis B**: A series of 3 immunization injections is required. 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.

SAMPLE IMMUNIZATION SCHEDULE FOR AUSTRALIA

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before the start of program</th>
<th>Immunizations</th>
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<tr>
<td>7 weeks</td>
<td>Influenza</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 weeks</td>
<td>Tetanus (Td, Tdap)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 weeks</td>
<td>Hepatitis A vaccine</td>
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With reasonable attention to health and hygiene rules, your stay in Australia 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 term. 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!