

HEALTH

GUIDELINES



& REQUIREMENTS

**Vietnam: Culture, Social Change, and
Development**

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BRIEF SUMMARY

Prior to Departure:

- Schedule an appointment with your health care provider 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**.
- Discuss your specific travel itinerary (including various in-country locations you plan to visit) with your health care provider and discuss:
 - **Required vaccines:** Covid-19 vaccine and up-to-date boosters are required for SIT programs.
 - **Recommended vaccines** including Tdap booster, hepatitis A & B, influenza, typhoid, rabies, and Japanese encephalitis.
 - Prevention and treatment of traveler's diarrhea.

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.

While you are in Vietnam:

- Take measures to prevent traveler's diarrhea.
- Take preventive measures to avoid mosquito and flea bites.
- Do not travel alone and maintain an awareness of your surroundings at all times.
- 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 Vietnam, 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 Vietnam especially as you venture to smaller cities off the usual tourist track or spend time in small villages and rural areas for extended periods.

It is essential that you review these health guidelines and requirements with your health care provider, 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 (Web site: <http://www.cdc.gov/travel>) or your own health care provider.



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

PREVENTION OF INSECT-BORNE ILLNESSES

Insect precautions are recommended for this program. Malaria is not a problem in Ho Chi Minh City (the program base); and the scheduled destinations of the program including the cities of Hanoi and the Mekong Delta. It does occur however, in certain rural locations. Insect precautions are usually sufficient for this program. However, if you plan to do your Independent Study Project (ISP) or Internship in a malarious area or plan to visit one after the program ends; you should bring the appropriate amount of malaria prophylaxis with you. 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 health care provider or health-care provider.** If, despite adherence to these preventive measures, you develop symptoms of malaria, prompt medical attention lessens the severity of the illness.

The following measures 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, Muskol. These products may be used on skin in concentration up to 30–40% and on clothing in higher concentration. 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>

Japanese Encephalitis

Japanese Encephalitis is a viral infection affecting the brain, which occurs in rural tropical areas, primarily during the rainy season (April–November in the north and year-round in the south) and is passed by mosquitoes mainly during the evening hours. The highest incidence occurs in the area around Hanoi and in the Mekong and Red River deltas. A vaccine, which is helpful in prevention, is currently licensed in the United States. Vaccinations should be considered if you are planning to do your Independent Study Project (ISP) in a rural area during the rainy season, or if you plan to travel to a rural or agricultural area for a significant time before or after the program. In addition, all travelers should follow personal protective measures to avoid mosquito bites (see under malaria section).

Chikungunya

Chikungunya is an arboviral infection that is transmitted by day-biting *Aedes* mosquitoes. 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.

Zika

Zika is a viral infection that is also transmitted by the bite of the *Aedes* mosquitoes. Risk exists and is limited to the southern and central areas of the country especially in Ho Chi Minh City. Symptoms include mild fever, rash, conjunctivitis (red eyes), joint or muscle pain and headache. The disease causes considerable discomfort, but is mild and self-limited, lasting for several days to a week. There are no vaccines or medications available to prevent or treat Zika infections therefore students should be vigilant in using insect precautions and personal protection measures against day-biting mosquitoes (see insect precautions section above). CDC recommends that pregnant women consider postponing travel to countries where the Zika virus is prevalent.

Dengue

Dengue is a viral disease and is transmitted by mosquitoes which bite primarily in the daytime. It occurs in urban as well as rural areas. The disease

causes considerable discomfort (fever, body aching), but is self-limited in adults. Risk is greatest in the Mekong delta region and is extremely high in Ho Chi Minh City especially during the peak of the rainy season (June through September). There is no licensed vaccine against it, but personal protective measures against mosquito bites are effective in prevention (see insect precautions section).

Rickettsial Infections: Typhus

Murine typhus is a bacterial disease that is transmitted to people by the bite of infected fleas, mites (chiggers), lice, or ticks usually harbored by rats and other small mammals (cats, dogs et al.). Symptoms may vary and its severity but are typically headache, fever, chills, and rash. Low risk exists in Vietnam including Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. There is currently no vaccine to prevent typhus. Travelers should avoid rodents and their fleas. Insect precautions are recommended. Travelers who are asymptomatic should seek immediate medical attention and are treated with antibiotics.



PREVENTION OF FOOD- AND WATER-BORNE ILLNESSES

Diarrhea-producing infections

“Traveler’s diarrhea” is the most common form of diarrhea in Vietnam. 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 (World Health Organization’s Oral Rehydration Solution which comes in package form) or other home-made solutions such as: 1 teaspoon salt, 1/2 teaspoon baking soda, and 2–3 tablespoons sugar or honey

in 1 liter of **clean** water; another option is 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 are indicated for more severe cases of traveler’s diarrhea.

More protracted and disabling diarrheal illnesses may be due to giardiasis and amoebic dysentery (caused by parasites) and bacillary dysentery (caused by bacteria), including cholera and typhoid. These infections (as well as “traveler’s diarrhea”) are caused by contaminated food and water. Therefore, the best way to avoid such infections is to 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) 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).

DON’T DRINK

- Tap water, this includes not using it to brush your teeth or using ice made from tap 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. These provide substantial protection when added to tap water. Chlorine in various forms is less reliable than iodine.

DO EAT

- Cooked vegetables, fruits with thick covering (citrus, bananas, and melons).
- 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).

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.

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. Discuss this with your healthcare provider.

A note on swimming: Avoid swimming or wading in fresh water. Many parasites and bacteria live in water and can cause serious illness. Properly chlorinated pools and salt water are generally safe from infectious diseases.

OTHER DISEASES

Rabies

Rabies is a viral disease almost always caused by animal bites (especially dogs). Risk occurs in Vietnam and, therefore, you should take measures to prevent it. Given the 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 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 test can indicate prior exposure to tuberculosis and is recommended prior to travel. A repeat test is also recommended after returning to the US even if the pre-departure test was negative.

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 which 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.

Hand-Foot-Mouth Disease (HFMD)

This very unpleasant and highly contagious viral disease usually begins with a fever, malaise, and sore throat, followed by painful blisters on the mucous membranes of the mouth and tongue, and also on the hands and feet. It usually resolves within a week but is very uncomfortable. It is highly contagious and occurs throughout the year, especially in the southern provinces including Ho Chi Minh City. Frequent hand washing is in order especially after contact with children or with anyone who seems to have this type of illness.



Air Quality

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

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.

Avian Influenza A H5N1/H5N6/H5N8

The Avian influenza, a particularly virulent strain of influenza virus, is endemic in Vietnam and is excreted in the droppings of infected birds, including poultry. Sporadic human cases have occurred after direct contact with poultry. The last human case was reported more than two years ago. The risk to travelers is minimal, but it is important to avoid poultry farms and live animal markets. Well-cooked chicken is safe to eat. Current influenza vaccines are not protective. The anti-viral medicines oseltamivir ("Tamiflu"), and Baloxavir are effective against this virus.

Coronavirus COVID-19

COVID-19 is a 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. 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. Vaccines are available to protect against the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). *The best way to protect yourself is to obtain the COVID-19 vaccine and up-to-date boosters and 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. 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.** Put distance between yourself and other people, if possible, by staying at least 6 feet apart.
- **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 health care provider** 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**, anywhere required by host country laws or in locations where SIT staff and partners on the ground have determined it is necessary based on current circumstances.
- **Most importantly, stay connected:** 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.

With reasonable attention to health and hygiene rules, your stay in Vietnam should be a healthy one. Aside from minor ailments due to adjustments to the new food, water, and climate, this is the experience of the large majority of SIT Study Abroad students. We do, however, recommend you see your health care provider upon returning to the US in order to test for any possible lingering infection contracted overseas.

Take good care of yourself!

