

Cruise Travel Health Advice



Cruising has become an increasingly popular choice of holiday in recent years. In 2008 an estimated 13 million passengers worldwide choose to travel on cruise ships including approximately 1.5 million British nationals.

If you are planning to take a cruise the following advice may help to ensure that you enjoy the experience to the full.

Pre Travel Health Advice:

Allow plenty of time for a pre travel consultation with your doctor or nurse. Book an appointment at least 6-8 weeks before you travel to discuss your travel plans and assess your individual travel health requirements.

Temperature changes, weather variations, changes in diet and physical activities can all impact on your general state of health when cruising particularly for the older traveller. Talk to your doctor or nurse before embarking on a cruise if you have any health issues that might increase your potential for illness on a cruise ship and notify the cruise line of any special needs before you travel. Some cruise ships may be unsuitable for frail, elderly and handicapped travellers. Suitability, therefore, should be ascertained prior to booking particularly if special facilities are required.

Vaccinations:

Check that you are up to date with your routine vaccines, including influenza or pneumococcal vaccination particularly if you are in a group for whom protection is recommended.

Travel vaccine requirements are likely to vary depending on the type of cruise you are going on, the countries you will be visiting, the time of year and whether there are any overnight stays on shore. **It is important to take your exact itinerary with you to discuss your travel vaccine needs.**

You may require a valid certificate of vaccination against yellow fever, which is an immigration requirement if you plan to go ashore in some countries especially in the Caribbean, South and Central America and sub-Saharan Africa. Unvaccinated passengers may not be allowed ashore in these countries so ask your practice nurse or doctor for further advice if you are unsure about whether you need to be vaccinated against yellow fever for your chosen cruise.

Insurance:

Comprehensive travel insurance is essential for all travellers. Ensure that your insurance is appropriate for your trip and the activities you intend to participate in. Check that your policy covers repatriation if necessary and tell

the insurance company of any pre-existing conditions, as treatment of these conditions may be excluded; failure to do so may invalidate your insurance.

Malaria:

- Most excursions ashore on cruises are during daylight hours when mosquitoes that transmit malaria are not feeding therefore you should not need to take tablets to prevent the disease.
- Occasionally some cruises include over night stays in areas where malaria is a risk and you may be ashore or on deck after dusk. For example, the Amazon in Brazil, or the Orinoco River in Venezuela. Cruises along the East African coast may also include a stop for a night or more in the port of Mombasa, Kenya. **It is important to discuss your cruise itinerary with your doctor or nurse**, as it may be necessary for you to take malaria prevention tablets.
- You should take all precautions to avoid insect bites when on cruising holidays e.g. insect repellent sprays etc

Medication:

If you need to take medication regularly ensure that you have a sufficient supply to last you for the whole trip. Supplies of medication onboard ship are likely to be limited and obtaining supplies on shore is discouraged due to the prevalence in some countries of counterfeit drugs. Carry all prescription medicines in the original packet or container and ask your doctor for a letter outlining your personal health and treatment before you travel. If you have a pre-existing medical condition you should inform the cruise company/medical team of your condition.

Medical Care Onboard:

Health care is usually available on board ship however medical equipment is limited and medical facilities available may vary, particularly on smaller ships. Medical and dental treatment received onboard is usually not free of charge. You should check with your cruise line before you book. The majority of illnesses seen on cruise ships can be treated onboard but you should be aware that in the event of an acute medical emergency you may have to disembark at whatever port is nearest whilst repatriation is arranged.

Accidents and injuries onboard:

Historically, cruise ships are considered one of the safest forms of transport due to the application of strict international regulations.

Falls are a frequent cause of injury on ships; care should be taken whilst onboard. Very young children or older travellers with poor balance are more likely to sustain injury while walking around the ship, particularly in rough seas, since they tend to be less agile and have slower reaction times. Embarking/disembarking from large ships to small boats can prove hazardous particularly for those with mobility problems. Accidents onboard ship may also occur as a result of over indulgence in alcohol. Passengers should avoid sitting on balcony or deck railings because of the risk of falling overboard.

Finally make sure that you familiarise yourself with the ships emergency evacuation procedures.

Motion Sickness:

Seasickness or motion sickness is the feeling of nausea and dizziness associated with the movement of the boat. It is not possible to predict who will suffer from motion sickness but large cruise ships normally have stabilizers that will eliminate much of the motion responsible for seasickness. However, even on big cruise liners and ferries the boat moves in relation to the horizon or coast line, potentially causing motion sickness. If you are concerned about motion sickness then talk to your doctor or pharmacist about medication against motion sickness before you travel.

Food and water:

Food and alcohol on cruise ships is generally available in abundance. Changes in diet and environment are a common cause of gastric upsets when on holiday, although tempting, try to avoid over indulging.

Eating and drinking on board ship is often considered safer than eating and drinking onshore, however outbreaks of gastrointestinal infections occasionally occur onboard. Gastrointestinal infections (commonly caused by the norovirus) are highly contagious, you can reduce your risk of infection with good personal hygiene; make sure that you wash your hands frequently with soap and water or an alcohol-based cleaner particularly during and on return from, on-shore visits and, particularly before eating or drinking. Any illness should be reported promptly to the ships crew or medical team as isolation may be required.

Care in the Sun:

Extra care must be taken to avoid sunburn when cruising. Ultra violet (UV) light reflection from the sun on the water increases the risk of sunburn when at sea. Remember that it is still possible to experience the damaging effects of the sun even on cool cloudy days so protect yourself from skin damage at all times by taking a few simple precautions:

- Avoid exposure to the sun when it is at its highest point in the sky (between 10am and 3pm)
- Always use a sunscreen with a high sun protection factor (at least SPF15 or above). Sunscreen should be applied 30 minutes before exposure to the sun and reapplied frequently especially after swimming and vigorous exercise.
- Wear sunglasses (preferably the wrap-around type) and a wide-brimmed hat in the sun. Cover as much of the skin as possible with sun-protective clothing if exposure during peak times is unavoidable

This leaflet has been prepared by Sanofi Pasteur MSD to provide general information on issues relating to healthy travel. It is not meant as an alternative to individual advice and should be used in conjunction with advice provided for you by a health care professional.