

# **International travel and health**

Situation as on 1 January 2007



**World Health  
Organization**

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## Preface

International travel is undertaken by large, and ever increasing, numbers of people for professional, social, recreational and humanitarian purposes. More people travel greater distances and at greater speed than ever before, and this upward trend looks set to continue. Travellers are thus exposed to a variety of health risks in unfamiliar environments. Most such risks, however, can be minimized by suitable precautions taken before, during and after travel, and it is the purpose of this book to provide guidance on measures to prevent or reduce any adverse consequences for travellers' health.

The book is addressed primarily to medical and public health professionals who provide health advice to travellers, but it is also intended to provide guidance to travel agents and organizers, airlines and shipping companies. As far as possible, the information is presented in a form readily accessible to interested travellers and non-medical readers. For medical professionals, to whom other sources of additional material are available, essential information is given as concisely as possible.

The book is intended to give guidance on the full range of significant health issues associated with travel. The roles of the medical profession, the travel industry and travellers themselves in avoiding health problems are recognized. The recommendations address the health risks associated with different types of travel and travellers.

In this edition, emerging problems such as avian influenza and chikungunya have been added. Vaccine recommendations and schedules have been substantially revised and new vaccines are included. The chapter on malaria has been expanded to reflect current treatment options for malaria in travellers.

Air travel and its associated health risks receive emphasis, reflecting the enormous recent increase in travel by air, particularly long-haul flights. The passenger shipping industry (cruise ships and ferries) has expanded considerably in recent decades. In this edition, a section on travel by sea has been added to address the specific health issues involved. Business travel has increased dramatically, with frequent travellers now forming a substantial proportion of the total. Large numbers of

travellers move far beyond the customary leisure and business centres, both for professional purposes and for pleasure, and there are now more elderly travellers, some of whom have pre-existing health problems. The risks and precautions specifically concerning infants and young children who travel also require special attention. An emerging subgroup of travellers — recent immigrants who return to their home countries for the purpose of visiting friends and relatives (VFR) — deserve a special section in this book because they are at a higher risk of certain health problems compared with traditional tourist and business travellers. A section on Hajj pilgrims has also been added.

Information is given on environmental factors that may have adverse effects on travellers' health and well-being. The main infectious diseases that pose potential health threats for travellers are described individually, with the corresponding preventive measures. The worldwide distribution of the major infectious diseases is shown in maps, and—where possible—extensive text has been replaced by lists and tables. A separate chapter is devoted to information on the vaccine-preventable diseases and the corresponding vaccines, as well as guidance on the selection of vaccines for individual travellers. Sources of additional information are included with each chapter.

The printed edition of this book is revised and published every year. An Internet version ([www.who.int/ith](http://www.who.int/ith)) allows continuous updating and provides links to other information, such as news of current disease outbreaks of international importance.

