

International travel and health

Situation as on 1 January 2005



**World Health
Organization**

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WHO Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

International travel and health: situation as on 1 January 2005.

1. Communicable disease control
2. Travel
3. Vaccination-standards
4. Risk factors I. World Health Organization

ISBN 92 4 158036 4 (NLM Classification: WA 110)
ISSN 0254-296X

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Printed in Switzerland

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Acknowledgements

WHO gratefully acknowledges the collaboration of travel medicine experts and end-users of *International travel and health* who have provided advice and information for the 2005 edition.

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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 these pages 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 details 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.

Air travel and its associated health risks receive great emphasis, reflecting the enormous recent expansion in travel by air, particularly in long-haul flights. In this edition, the chapter on travel by air has been revisited by a group of experts to be more informative. 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.

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 is now published only every second year but an Internet version (www.who.int/ith) allows on-going updating and provides easy links to other information, such as news of current disease outbreaks of international importance.