

## Healthcare, Voluntary and Charity Workers

Health care and voluntary / charity workers can be at increased risk of certain travel health problems. These risks will vary depending on the destination, type of work undertaken, living conditions and length of stay. Research on the potential health risks at the destination and risks associated with the particular work should be undertaken. Some of the issues to consider will include:

**Physical / mental health:** Working in resource poor countries can be physically and mentally tough. Carry the essentials to look after your own health such as a basic first aid kit, diarrhoea treatment packs, any medicines you may require (check there are no problems taking these in to the country, codeine based pain killers for example are banned in some countries), sun cream, insect repellents and insecticide treated bed nets. Consider if you can obtain clean water to drink and if not look at taking equipment to treat the water.

Before going out, consider if it possible to talk to others that have been working out in the same area. If you are new to this type of work it can be stressful and many people on prolonged stays will experience culture shock. Try and find out about the local culture and language before you travel. Take appropriate clothing – in some areas shorts and vests will not be suitable. Consider how you will contact friends and family if necessary, will your mobile phone work at the destination for example?

**Infectious Diseases:** Those working in close contact with the local population in developing countries will be at increased risk of the 'diseases of close association' such as tuberculosis, diphtheria, polio and meningitis and measles. Check all relevant vaccines are up to date.

Those doing health care work or other work that increases the risk of exposure to body fluids such as blood, will be at increased risk of blood borne viruses such as hepatitis B and C, and HIV. Consider whether there will be access to protective equipment such as gloves and aprons, goggles and where this is not certain; arrange to carry relevant supplies out. Check that vaccinations for hepatitis B vaccines have been completed and boosted as necessary. Those performing 'exposure prone procedures' such as surgery and dental work may want to consider taking a HIV post exposure treatment pack for certain destinations.

**Insurance:** If you are going to work with an organisation, often there will be plans in place to get you to good medical facilities or home if you were to become ill or if serious political unrest develops in the area. Those working independently should also insure they have comprehensive insurance cover. Those doing health care work should check that their professional insurance cover will cover them for working overseas.

**This information is produced by MASTA as a general guide to be used in conjunction with advice from your doctor or nurse. To obtain a health brief tailored to your journey visit a MASTA associated travel clinic or [www.masta.com](http://www.masta.com)**