

Vaccinations



Q My clients are planning a trip to several countries in Asia. I have advised that no immunizations are required, but their doctor has recommended several vaccinations, including shots against hepatitis A and typhoid fever. The clients wonder if I know what I am talking about. What do I tell them?

A The concept of "required" vs. "recommended" vaccinations is often a source of confusion not only to travelers and travel agents, but also to the medical community at large.

Required immunizations are those legally required by the destination country to protect its citizens from the importation of disease, even if in some cases these requirements may incidentally protect the traveler as well.

The only immunization currently required is the yellow fever vaccine. Some countries require this vaccine for travelers coming from anywhere. In some instances, it is required for travelers transiting a country where yellow fever is present.

It is important to know the country's requirement in advance because if travelers arrive without proof of yellow fever vaccination, they may be turned away at the border, quarantined for 10 days or given the shot on arrival at the airport.

Suffice it to say, the needle used to give the shot may be a "reusable" needle — not clean and sterile — and hence pose an even greater risk to travelers' health.

The yellow fever vaccine must be received at least 10 days prior to arrival at the destination.

It must be received at a certified Yellow Fever Vaccination Center (most travel medicine clinics in the U.S. are certified to give the vaccine).

Proof of yellow fever vaccination is entered onto an International Certificate of Vaccination which is carried with the passport. This certificate is good for 10 years.

The only travelers for whom there might be a risk in receiving the yellow fever vaccine are those who are pregnant or immunosuppressed.

The decision to receive the vaccine in these cases should be made with a knowledgeable travel health provider.

It is important to mention that the cholera vaccine no longer is required.

According to the World Health Organization, no country should require proof of a cholera immunization. However, sometimes when crossing between certain countries' borders, guards may request proof of a cholera shot.

This sometimes reflects lack of current information or, in some instances, is a thinly veiled request for a bribe.

Border crossings where this commonly occurs are well known to practitioners of travel medicine and should be discussed with a travel health provider, where appropriate precautions can be taken to prevent this problem.

Vaccinations are not required to protect against many diseases that are of great risk to the traveler.

In fact, the more important immuniza-

B I O



DR. BRADLEY CONNOR IS A NEW YORK-BASED TRAVEL MEDICINE

SPECIALIST AND MEMBER OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF TRAVEL MEDICINE.

tions are those that are recommended.

Recommended immunizations protect travelers from diseases for which they could be at risk. They include such vaccines as hepatitis A, hepatitis B, typhoid and, in certain instances, tetanus/diphtheria, polio, measles and meningitis.

In other instances, vaccines against Japanese encephalitis, rabies, influenza and pneumococcal pneumonia may be recommended as well.

The best place to get information on vaccines that are recommended for a given trip is the Web site of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, at www.cdc.gov.

A list of travel medicine clinics can be obtained through the International Society of Travel Medicine's Web site, at www.istm.org.

This column is designed to answer agent questions of general interest to the trade. Please address your questions to Dr. Connor at bconnor@pol.net.