

HIV Infection and International Travel

AIDS is a disease caused by the HIV virus. This virus attacks the immune system and makes it difficult for the body to fight infection. It is transmitted through sexual intercourse with an infected person, contact with contaminated needles and syringes, or contact with contaminated blood or blood products. This disease is present worldwide, but is especially widespread in Southeast Asia and Africa.

To minimize the risk of infection the traveler should follow these precautions:

Sexual Intercourse:

Avoid sexual intercourse, especially with persons suspected of being HIV positive. This includes intravenous drug users, persons with multiple sexual partners, and male and female prostitutes. Because it is often not possible to determine if a person is HIV positive, it is a good idea to avoid intercourse with anyone you do not know very well. If you choose to have sexual intercourse, use a condom. Diaphragms in combination with spermicide may provide additional protection.

Contaminated Needles and Syringes:

- Avoid intravenous drug use and needle sharing
- Avoid acupuncture, tattooing and ear piercing.
- Get a dental check-up prior to travelling to reduce the need for dental treatment while abroad.
- Get all necessary immunizations before leaving home.
- Avoid injections or blood tests that are not absolutely necessary, and try to make sure any equipment used is appropriately sterilized. Contact the local American Embassy or Consulate if in doubt.
- Persons such as diabetics who require frequent injections should carry adequate supplies of sterile syringes and needles. In certain situations, other travelers may want to carry a kit containing sterile syringes, needles, and suture materials. A letter from a physician should accompany the kit to avoid confiscation by customs.

Transfusion of Contaminated Blood and Blood Products.

- Avoid transfusion of blood that has not been tested for HIV. Blood is tested in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and Western Europe. Contact the local American Embassy or Consulate for advice if in any other country.
- You and your traveling companions should know your blood type. You may be able to donate for each other in an emergency.
- Drive carefully. Use a seat belt if available. Avoid alcohol while driving and try to avoid riding in overcrowded public vehicles.
- Avoid immune globulin/gamma globulin injections (used to prevent hepatitis A) unless manufactured in North America, Western Europe or Australia.

Homemade ORS – If you don't have packets of ORS salts or Rehydralyte, you can follow these guidelines:

** Alternate soup or broth with sugared drink. Drinking these solutions provides a balance of salt and glucose.

** Prepare homemade ORS in the following manner:

- 1 liter water (boiled or treated)
- 1/2 tsp. Table salt
- 1/4 tsp. Salt substitute (provides potassium chloride)
- 1/2 tsp. Baking soda
- 4 TBsp. Of sucrose (table sugar), or 2 TBsp of glucose

NOTE: a 1-liter Nalgene bottle is very convenient for the accurate preparation of ORS solution.