

How to stay alive

A health briefing will form part of your basic training, but it's something that's so important it's worth reiterating here. This is a list of some basic do's and don'ts:

DO:

- Visit your GP well in advance to get all the jabs you need. Some inoculations need a course that will last three months. Take your vaccination certificates with you when you go.
- Make sure you have health insurance that is valid for the countries you are visiting and the activities you're doing, particularly if you're building, as some policies don't cover that. Make sure it covers emergency evacuation if you're going somewhere that doesn't have good hospitals. Check with your sending agency if you're uncertain
- Buy a first aid kit to take with you, and make sure it's got plenty of needles.
- Make sure you've got malaria pills, mosquito repellent and nets if you're going to a country where there's malaria.
- Take a good supply of any regular medicines you take.
- Make sure you, your team leader and your next of kin know your blood type.
- Make sure your agency knows who your next of kin is.
- Avoid all wild animals – they could have rabies.
- Take appropriate clothing for the altitude and climate.
- Use plenty of sunblock and drink lots of (bottled) water if it's hot and sunny.
- Take a supply of surgical gloves for use if coming into contact with body fluids.
- Take a supply of oral rehydration fluid.
- Wash your hands frequently using antibacterial gel.
- Use water purification tablets if you don't know for certain that the water is either bottled or boiled and filtered.
- Rest during the hottest part of the day.
- Wear a sunhat.
- Go and see a doctor if you feel ill when you get back home, and tell him you've been abroad.
- Have a dental checkup before you go to avoid having to find a dentist abroad.
- Follow the advice of your team leader and local host.
- Keep taking your malaria pills for four weeks after you get home.
- At the first sign of illness, consult a doctor.

DON'T:

- Eat salads or unwashed fruit.
- Drink unfiltered water or drinks with ice cubes in.
- Swim in lakes – there could be predators or water-borne diseases.
- Eat food from roadside stalls.
- Sunbathe for very long, particularly at altitude or in the tropics.
- Get in dangerous looking vehicles.
- Drive at night.