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Suggestions for General Health During Your Time in the Dominican Republic

General: Wash hands before eating/drinking anything; drink plenty of water; avoid sugary foods and drinks

Vaccines

Start with CDC recommendations, family doctor, or travel clinic; they will likely recommend:

Typhoid
Malaria prophylaxis
Hep A/B
Tetanus update
Update all routine vaccines
Annual Influenza vaccine

Medications to take along (Keep all personal medications in carry-on luggage)

Antibiotic (for traveler's diarrhea) such as Ciprofloxacin or Azithromycin
Anti-diarrheal (for traveler's diarrhea)
Motion sickness (Dramamine or Meclizine over the counter)
Benadryl tablets for bug bites
Bug bite topical cream or ointment (avoid topical Benadryl)
Your everyday meds—you are not “on vacation”
Be careful with any meds (e.g., anti-acne) that interact adversely with sun

Care in the Sun

The sun is much, much stronger in the Caribbean than in the Pacific NW. It can burn your skin quickly, sap energy, and play a role in dehydrating you. Sunscreen is recommended for all participants; if your skin tends to burn easily, it is essential. Environmental Working Group (ewg.org) publishes an annual report on non-toxic, sweat- and waterproof sunscreens, and is highly recommended. They recommend a sunscreen that blocks both UVA and UVB rays and is at least SPF 30 or greater. To be effective, sunscreen must be applied 20 minutes before going out in the sun. A hat keeps sun from beating directly down upon your head, and is highly recommended; sunglasses also recommended.

Insects and Insect-borne illnesses (Bug Repellent & Protective clothing)

Dengue, Malaria, Chikungunya, Zika— all can be contracted via mosquito bite. Therefore it's important to take precautions: using insect repellent containing around 25% DEET (such as Deep Woods Off), and wearing long pants (at all times except sleeping) and long-sleeve shirts in the evening. Ankle socks, which give mosquitoes room to bite your legs, are not recommended. You will sweat more, but you'll get fewer bites. At the same time, it's important not to get paranoid: we will all get a few bites, inevitably. Information regarding these diseases are available on the CDC website listed below. Even though malaria risk is very low in the communities where we work, we still recommend malaria prophylaxis because the endemic regions for malaria have been changing.

Rural & Urban Area Exposure (incl. altitude)

We'll be in both rural and urban areas, with more time spent in rural. The home stay (6 days) is in a rural area, in which altitude does not exceed 4000 ft. The remainder of the program days we have dinner and sleep at a retreat center in a green part of the city of Santiago, but spend the daytime hours in rural settings (less than 1000 ft altitude).

Diarrhea

It is most likely that you will, at some point have some gastrointestinal complaint. This could range from constipation due to the change in diet to vomiting and diarrhea. If you believe you are getting ill, please contact your chaperones as soon as possible so that they may help you. Don't wait until you get too sick just because you might be embarrassed. It is important to get help early.

Trauma

By far, the most common cause for serious illness overseas is trauma; most commonly motor vehicle accidents. Be extremely careful when walking around the city of Santiago and anywhere else there is traffic. It is not like in the US where the pedestrian has the right of way. Do not ride on motorcycles. Only take transportation that is sponsored by your directors.

Please check the CDC website for travelers to the DR:

<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/dominican-republic>