

Destination Guide for South Korea

Overview

Destination Risk Levels

- Low Medical Risk for South Korea
- Low Travel Risk for South Korea

Standing Travel Advice

- Take basic security precautions against petty and street crime.
- In the event of any demonstrations, rallies or strike activity, avoid the affected area as a security precaution. Localised clashes could occur between protesters and the police, particularly if the former attempt to block routes, march towards cordoned-off areas or breach security cordons around government buildings.
- In the event of any emergency drills, exercises or military manoeuvres, comply with all instructions issued by the security forces.
- Seek itinerary-specific advice prior to travel to the disputed north-western islands of Yeonpyeong, Baengnyeong, Daecheong, Socheong and Woo.

Active Alerts (1)

● Notice | Category

North Asia: Expect intermittent disruption during monsoon season until November (Revised)

20 June 2025 at 12:27

Location : Asia & the Pacific

Category : Flood, Landslide, Storm, Infrastructure outage

Expect intermittent disruption **until November** during the ongoing summer monsoon season in **China, Hong Kong, Macao** (both China SAR), **Japan, North Korea, South Korea** and **Taiwan** (China). The region experienced this year's first weather system, Severe Tropical Storm Wutip, in mid-June, which caused logistical disruption along its passage in southern China. Neighbouring countries and regions also experienced heavy rainfall due to the impact of Wutip. Further typhoons can be expected in the coming months, which could pose challenge to travel logistics. Maintain flexible itineraries and monitor updates from meteorological agencies and local contacts to reconfirm feasibility of travel.

Advice :

- Monitor the meteorological department websites of [China](#), [Hong Kong](#), [Japan](#), [Macao](#), [South Korea](#) and [Taiwan](#) for prevailing weather conditions and typhoon-related warnings. Follow all official directives, including any evacuation orders.
- Reconfirm the feasibility of overland journeys with local contacts before setting out. Ensure that your vehicle is in good condition and appropriately equipped for the weather conditions.
- Heavy rain and poor visibility may cause short-notice flight delays or cancellations. **We do not hold specific information on flights or other transport.** Contact the airport, the airline or other relevant service providers directly to confirm schedules.
- Avoid surge-prone or flooded areas. Be aware that flash flooding in riverine or coastal areas and landslides are possible in mountainous areas following heavy rain. Do not attempt to drive or walk through flooded areas.
- Essential services such as electricity and communications may be disrupted by severe rainfall. Charge all communications devices and, where feasible, keep extra batteries for backup.
- Monitor our alerts for updates.

Destination Guide for South Korea

Before You Travel

Visa Requirements

IMMIGRATION REQUIREMENTS AND PROCEDURES

British

Passport Required: Yes
Visa Required: No
Return Ticket Required: No

Australian

Passport Required: Yes
Visa Required: No
Return Ticket Required: No

Canadian

Passport Required: Yes
Visa Required: No/1
Return Ticket Required: No

USA

Passport Required: Yes
Visa Required: No
Return Ticket Required: No

EU

Passport Required: Yes
Visa Required: No/2
Return Ticket Required: No

Visas

All nationals referred to in the above chart can stay without visas for three months except:

1. Nationals of Canada can stay for six months.
2. Nationals of Portugal can stay for 90 days.

Citizens of countries mentioned in the [list](#) do not require visas for stays of up to 90 days. Foreign nationals eligible for visa free entry mentioned [here](#) are generally required to obtain [Korean Electronic Travel Authorization](#) (K-ETA). However, this has been temporarily waived for [22 countries](#) until 31 December 2025. Travellers aged under 18 years or over 65 years are also exempt from K-ETA. All other nationals should consult their nearest South Korean diplomatic mission to check their visa requirements. Business travellers intending to stay beyond 90 days are required to obtain a long-term visa prior to arrival. The cost of a visa varies from country to country. Generally, five working days are required for visa processing. Business travellers planning to attend conferences should check with their local embassy if they should apply for a specific visa in advance. Changing a visa status is generally not possible, meaning foreign nationals will have to exit the country and reapply for a new visa. Business travellers planning to stay past their visa expiration date should apply for an extension well in advance at the Korea Immigration Service. Travellers who overstay their visa will be required to pay a fine before leaving.

Procedures

All travellers will be subject to health screening measures at airports. In addition, the Korea Immigration Service (KIS) gathers the biometric data of travellers at ports of entry. Foreign nationals whose passports contain evidence of travel to North Korea may face thorough and time-consuming checks. Foreign nationals intending to stay beyond 90 days are required to apply for an Alien Registration Card. Travellers should consult the Immigration Bureau [website](#) for further details.

Entry/Exit Requirements

Entry/Exit requirements

Nationals of all countries require a passport valid for a minimum of three months beyond their stay. As of September 2024, anyone who has visited, stayed, or transited through locations mentioned [here](#) must submit a Q-CODE or health declaration form upon entering the country.

Business travellers and foreign nationals are required to submit a customs declaration form and an [e-Arrival card](#) up to 72 hours prior to entering the country. Foreign nationals must also record their fingerprints and facial scan (biometrics) upon entry. However, diplomats, officials of international organisations and their immediate family members are exempt. Travellers carrying foreign or local currency exceeding US\$10,000 must declare the amount on arrival.

Cultural Tips

CULTURAL ISSUES AND ETIQUETTE

General Tips

- Remove your shoes before entering a Korean home or temple.
 - US and Japanese nationals are advised not to broach potentially inflammatory subjects, such as the US military presence or Japan's occupation in the early 20th century. Avoid discussing current affairs and international relations during periods of strained relations.
 - There are some legal restrictions relevant to LGBTQ individuals but these are not enforced or adhered to in the legal system. Societal attitudes towards the LGBTQ community are highly varied. Violence is rare but may be more likely in rural than in urban settings.
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Getting There

METHOD OF ARRIVAL

By air

Incheon ([ICN](#)), adjacent to Seoul, replaced Gimpo ([GMP](#)) as the main international airport serving the capital. Gimpo (previously known as Kimpo) now serves mainly domestic flights and short-distance international flights.

Other international airports are Gimhae ([PUS](#)) in the city of Busan, Cheongju ([CJJ](#)) and Jeju ([CJU](#)). Daegu ([TAE](#)), Yangyang ([YNY](#)) and Muan ([MWX](#)) international airports operate flights between China and South Korea.

Airlines have variable security standards. You may wish to consult the European Commission's [website](#) for a list of airlines banned within the EU and the US Federal Aviation Administration's [website](#) for a database of aviation accidents and statistics.

By sea

Ferry services are available from China, Japan and Russia. However, sea journeys are time-consuming and therefore less efficient for business travellers. In addition, ferry services are vulnerable to adverse weather conditions, particularly during winter months.

Procedures

All travellers will be subject to health screening measures at airports. In addition, the Korea Immigration Service (KIS) gathers the biometric data of travellers at ports of entry. Foreign nationals whose passports contain evidence of travel to North Korea may face thorough and time-consuming checks. Foreign nationals intending to stay beyond 90 days are required to apply for an Alien Registration Card. Travellers should consult the Immigration Bureau [website](#) for further details.

Getting Around

BY AIR

[Korean Air](#) is the national carrier. Foreign nationals must carry passports on domestic flights. Wonju Airport ([WJU](#)), Gunsan Airport ([KUV](#)), Pohang Airport ([KPO](#)), Gwangju Airport ([KWJ](#)), Yeosu Airport ([RSU](#)), Sacheon ([HIN](#)) Airport and Ulsan Airport ([USN](#)) are the domestic airports. Charter flights are also available.

BY ROAD

The complexity of road layouts, the density of traffic and the need to understand Korean road signs is likely to make driving inconvenient for most short-term business travellers. Excellent motorways link major cities, but road surfaces on less-travelled routes can be poor. Traffic drives on the right. An international driving permit is required. Deaths due to poor or rash driving are common and car drivers are presumed to be at fault in accidents involving motorcycles or pedestrians. Drivers should be careful of motorcyclists and pedestrians. The charges are accompanied by heavy penalties in the event of injury. If the accident results in an injury or there is dispute about the cause, the police may impound the traveller's passport. The legal blood-alcohol limit is extremely low; motorists found guilty will be liable to pay a hefty fine and may face licence suspension or cancellation.

Heavy rain during the monsoon season (mid-June to mid-August) can temporarily block isolated sections of roads. Additionally, road closures due to heavy snow can cause significant disruption to overland travel in more rural areas. Avalanches and landslides can also block roads in mountainous areas during winter. Delays should be expected during the Lunar New Year (late January-early February) holiday period due to increased traffic.

BY TAXI

Taxis are safe, convenient and can be hired at a taxi rank or hailed on the street. There are two types of taxis; the regular grey, white or orange taxis, and the deluxe black taxis with yellow roof signs. Black taxis are generally more comfortable, though they are more expensive. Metered fares are strictly applied in cities. However, there have been isolated reports of taxi drivers tampering with the meter when conveying foreign passengers.

Orange taxi's initially symbolised a Seoul taxi, but the regulation was abolished in 2021. International taxis, whose drivers can speak English, Chinese and Japanese, are discernable by an international taxi logo. However, the price is about 20% higher than the normal taxis. Most normal taxi drivers do not speak languages other than Korean. International taxi services also offer translation facilities upon request. However, business travellers are advised to have the destination name written in Korean for convenience.

People in major cities also increasingly utilise phone applications such as Kakao T to arrange taxi services.

BY TRAIN

[Korean National Railways](#) runs a good railway network that connects all major cities. Services are safe and divided into three categories – non-stop Saemaeul trains, Mugunghwa trains and KTX express trains. [S-RAIL](#) also provides Super Rapid Train (SRT). KTX and SRT express trains are the fastest and most comfortable. Business travellers should have their destination and the type of ticket required written down in Korean characters (hotels will be able to assist). Station signs and timetables are often in both Korean and English.

BY OTHER MEANS

Comfortable air-conditioned buses run intercity services.

By Sea

Domestic ferry services are available throughout the country. Similar to international ferry journeys, domestic sea journeys are time-consuming and therefore less efficient in terms of travel time, particularly when compared to other forms of transport within South Korea.

Business Women

BUSINESSWOMEN

There are no specific risks for female business travellers or workforce. However, all women are advised to follow commonsense precautions such as:

- Exercise caution if travelling alone at night.
- Politely decline invitations that would take you beyond your personal comfort levels, even if faced by amicable pressure to behave otherwise.

Working Week

WORKING WEEK

- Working week: Monday to Friday
 - Office hours: 09.00-18.00
 - Bank hours: 09.00-16.00
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Language & Money

LANGUAGE

Korean is the official language. English is widely spoken in official and business circles and is spoken by staff at most good hotels. Not all Korean business associates speak English.

MONEY

The local currency is the South Korean won (W). ATMs are widely available; majority of foreign bank and credit cards are accepted. Banking services are sparser in rural areas compared to metropolitan areas. Traveller's cheques are accepted and can be exchanged easily at banks and bureau de change.

Tipping

TIPPING

Tipping is not customary as a service charge is usually included in the bill.

Geography & Weather

CLIMATE

Climate overview

- South Korea has a temperate climate with four distinct seasons: spring (March-May), summer (June-August), autumn (September-November) and winter (December-February).
- The average temperature of the country is 14°C (57°F) and peaks in August, while January is the coldest month.
- The spring and autumn seasons are sunny and dry, while winters are dry and cold. Summers are hot and humid and record the highest precipitation in July and August.
- Monitor the website of the [Korea Meteorological Administration](#) for weather-related updates.

Flooding and landslides

- Heavy rainfall during the rainy season and the aftermath of typhoon season result in flooding, landslides and travel disruption.
- Torrential rainfall can sometimes cause the Han river to overflow, leading to flooding in southern districts of Seoul, such as Gangnam, Gwanak and Seocho.
- In July 2023, heavy rain caused significant damage to agriculture and infrastructure, killing more than 30 people and displacing thousands. The most affected areas included North Chungcheong, North Gyeongsang and South Chungcheong provinces and Sejong.
- Heavy rainfall on Jeju Island (Jeju province) in July 2024 disrupted nearly 100 flights at Jeju International Airport (CJU), while passenger ferries were cancelled. Landslides, flash floods and power outages were also reported.

Tropical storms

- Tropical storms occur between July and September.
- Such powerful storms can bring strong winds and heavy rainfall, causing flash floods and landslides, which may result in infrastructural damage, evacuations and disruption to power, communication and water supplies.
- In August 2023, around 350 flights and 410 train routes were cancelled and more than 10,000 people were evacuated due to Tropical Storm Khanun.
- Coastal regions, including Gangneung, Sokcho (both Gangwon province) and Jeju Island, are mostly affected by the tropical storms.

Earthquakes

- South Korea experiences minor earthquakes.
- Large earthquakes, though infrequent, have the potential to cause significant damage and casualties.

Heatwaves

- South Korea experiences heatwaves during the summer months.
- In June 2024, two heatwave advisories were issued amid a record number of heatwave days, when daily maximum temperature reached 33°C (91.4°F) or higher. The previous record was set in 2018.
- In August 2023, the country raised its heatwave warning to the highest serious level for the first time since 2019.
- The authorities have previously issued heatwave advisories for citizens to take preventive measures.

Wildfires

- Dry weather and strong winds can exacerbate wildfires, especially during the spring season.
- Fires can result in transport disruption, casualties and infrastructural damage and also prompt evacuation orders.
- In March 2025, wildfires in the south-eastern region, including North Gyeongsang and South Gyeongsang provinces and Ulsan, killed at least 28 people. The fires were the country's largest on record, burning more than 147 sq miles (380 sq km) of land and forcing thousands to evacuate.

Tsunamis

- Tsunamis are mostly triggered by earthquakes in areas along the Pacific Ring of Fire.
- Low-lying coastal areas are susceptible to storm surges and tsunamis, which can cause coastal flooding.
- In January 2024, South Korea's east coast experienced its first tsunami, following a massive earthquake in Japan.
- Monitor the website of the [Korea Meteorological Administration](#) for tsunami-related updates.

Snowfall and cold waves

- Heavy snowfall, blizzards and cold waves occur during the winter season and can result in power outages, flight disruption, business closures and casualties.
- Extreme temperatures can also result in road and sea route closures, including in the capital Seoul.
- Temperatures can go below -36°C (-33°F) during a period of cold waves.

GEOGRAPHY

The Republic of Korea (South Korea) is bordered by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) to the north. The two states are separated by a 2.5-mile (4km) wide Demilitarised Zone (DMZ). South Korea is surrounded by the Sea of Japan (East Sea) to the east, the East China Sea to the south, and the Yellow Sea (West Sea) to the west. Its capital is Seoul and other big cities are Incheon, Busan, Daegu, Gwangju and Daejeon. The country is administratively divided into nine provinces, six metropolitan cities, one special city (Seoul) and one governing city (Sejong).

International Dialing & Power

DIALLING CODES

Country Code : 82

IDD Prefix (International Direct Dialling) : 001

NDD Prefix (National Direct Dialling) : 0, 082

COMMUNICATIONS

Both domestic and international telephone services in South Korea are excellent and equipped with new technologies. There are no restrictions on the use of satellite phones. South Korea also enjoys roaming agreements with foreign mobile phone companies. Business travellers can either rent phones or purchase prepaid SIM cards upon arrival at an airport. The major GSM mobile telephone networks are KT Corporation, LG Uplus and SK Telecom. Public telephones accept coins and phone cards. Internet cafes can be found in public places such as airports, train stations and bus terminals across the country. Postal services are widely available.

Information Security

People should anticipate a degree of government surveillance in South Korea, particularly over internet and social media, primarily due to the threat of cyberactivity from North Korea. Sharing of any sensitive information against national security is subject to screening and punishment under the National Security Law. Also, the government is known to co-operate with private telecommunications organisations to detect any threats to national security. People working in the defence, high-technology, financial, manufacturing, telecommunications and energy sectors are likely to be monitored more closely. Cybercrime against individuals and organisations continues to pose a threat, though the government has increased protection requirements and enhanced security measures against hacking, denial of service (DoS) attacks, malicious programmes and internet fraud. Most cybercriminals target individuals for financial purposes by illegally obtaining personal information. Various laws and regulations have been implemented that stipulate stiff penalties for crimes against national security, information network infringement and illegal use of information networks or personal information, among others.

Advice

- Minimise the number of devices you bring in-country. Only carry devices that are absolutely essential. Clean devices, containing only data necessary for the trip with no access to shared networks, should be used if targeted attacks are likely.
- Ensure all devices you bring in-country are well secured, with strong passwords. Ensure all storage devices have full disk encryption.
- Ensure all software, including anti-virus protection, is up to date prior to travel. Avoid updating software while away.
- Avoid connecting to insecure Wi-Fi networks where possible. Public Wi-Fi connections are almost always unencrypted. This allows attackers to easily instigate man-in-the-middle attacks, where they redirect your browsing request to a malicious website and then run malware on your device.
- If necessary, only connect to public networks using a virtual private network (VPN). Always familiarise yourself with the legal status of any VPN or application in your destination country prior to travel. Be aware of other relevant legislation, including compliance requests which allow authorities to inspect devices.
- Keep devices on your person as much as possible. If unattended, ensure devices are powered down and well secured. If using hotel safes, secure them with a secondary personally lockable device.
- Limit location tracking/turn off your phone's location function to deter surveillance, with the exception of our Assistance app or other essential applications. Turn off Wi-Fi and Bluetooth when not in use, unless instructed otherwise by the authorities for COVID-19 contact-tracing purposes.
- Run a thorough check of all devices upon your return and use the 'forget network' setting if you did connect to any public Wi-Fi networks.
- Comply with local legislation. This includes any official requests to inspect devices. If this occurs, inform your IT department as soon as possible and exercise caution when using the device after. Power off devices prior to approaching customs.
- Obtain profile-specific advice, taking into account your industry and position in the company.

ELECTRICITY

Calendar

Holidays & Security Dates

2025

01 Oct Armed Forces Day

Temporary public holiday. Expect heightened security and travel disruption in the capital Seoul and Gyeonggi province during related events.

03 Oct National Foundation Day

09 Oct Hangeul Proclamation Day

2026

01 Jan New Year's Day

In many countries, if this holiday falls on a Saturday or Sunday, a public holiday is declared for the following Monday.

05 May Children's Day

06 Jun Memorial Day

15 Aug National Liberation Day

Protests by civil society groups are likely on this day.

Destination Guide for South Korea 🇰🇷

Medical Overview

Medical Care

Good

Standard of Health Care

Let International SOS assist you.

International SOS will assist you to find suitable inpatient or outpatient care, will provide language assistance and may be able to pay your medical expenses.

Inpatient care

Medical care in South Korea is of an international standard. There are no major differences between the public and private sectors. However, private hospitals tend to be more service oriented.

Generally, nursing care may differ from what is practiced in other countries. Family members or privately hired care-giving aids are usually expected to assist the patient for non-medical support (such as feeding, bathing etc...).

Many physicians in the major hospitals speak English. If there is a language barrier, most hospitals are able to facilitate language assistance services through interpreters. International clinics will have English speaking staff.

Medical Contact

Emergency Numbers, hospital and clinic contact information

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Ambulance : 119

Fire service : 119

Police : 112

Hospitals & Clinics

Inje University Haeundae Paik Hospital

875 Haeun-daero Haeundae

82 517970566, 82 517970567

h12101@paik.ac.kr, top@paik.ac.kr

Pusan National University Hospital

179 GudeokRo Seogu

82 512407472

global7472@gmail.com

Asan Medical Center

4th Floor New building 88 Olympic Ro 43 Gil Songpa-gu

82 230105001

int@amc.seoul.kr

Samsung Medical Center

81 Irwon-ro Gangnam

82 15993114, 82 234100200, 82 234100232

ihs.smc@samsung.com

Severance Hospital

3rd Floor Main Building 50-1 Yonsei-ro Seodaemungu
82 222281004, 82 222285800
ihcc@yuhs.ac

Vaccinations

Routine and additional

Hepatitis A

Recommended for all travellers and international assignees, especially groups at higher risk including:

- long-term and frequent visitors.
- adventurous travellers who travel to more remote locations or stay in areas with poor sanitation.
- gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (see [US CDC](#)).
- people who use illicit drugs.
- those with liver disease.

Hepatitis A is a viral disease that causes liver inflammation. The virus is present in the faeces of an infected person. It spreads through contaminated food and water and is common in areas with poor sanitation. Person-to-person spread also occurs, when the virus is inadvertently transferred into the mouth, including during sexual activity. People at higher risk of infection include men who have sex with men, illicit drug users and people with liver disease.

Not everyone gets symptoms. If symptoms do occur, they begin two to four weeks or more after infection and can last for weeks or months. Symptoms include fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, diarrhoea, nausea/vomiting, abdominal pain/discomfort, jaundice (yellow colour of the skin and eyes), dark urine, clay-coloured stool, joint pain and itching. Many infected people suffer only a mild illness. Most cases recover fully after four or more weeks. However, for some, the disease can be severe, and occasionally is fatal. There is no specific treatment and cases are managed through supportive therapy.

Prevention is through vaccination, attention to hygiene, and access to safe food and water.

[Watch the Hepatitis Video Podcast](#) (Vimeo)

[View Viral Hepatitis Infographic Poster](#) (PDF)

The Disease

Hepatitis is a general term that means inflammation of the liver. Medications, poisons, alcohol and infections can all cause hepatitis.

Hepatitis A is inflammation of the liver caused by a virus. The virus is highly contagious. People are mostly infected through eating or drinking contaminated food or water, or through direct contact with an infected person. Usually people make a full recovery, however occasionally the disease can be severe or fatal. There is an effective vaccine available.

Transmission

The illness is transmitted via the "faecal-oral route". The virus is present in the stool of an infected person. Others are infected when they consume food / drink contaminated with the virus. This is more common in areas with poor sanitation systems and limited access to clean water.

It is also possible to get the disease via direct contact with an infected person's faecal matter, for example through incompletely washed hands, sexual contact or through shared illicit drugs.

Symptoms

Not everyone gets symptoms. Most childhood infections will be asymptomatic or mild. Most adults will develop symptoms, and severity increases with age.

If symptoms do occur, they begin two to four or more weeks after infection and can last for weeks or months. They include any or all of the following:

- fever
- fatigue
- loss of appetite
- diarrhoea
- nausea/vomiting
- abdominal pain/discomfort
- jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes)
- dark urine, clay-coloured stool
- joint pain
- itching

Most people make a full recovery. About 10 to 15% of symptomatic persons with hepatitis A may experience relapse or prolonged illness up to six months. Sometimes the disease is severe and can be fatal (less than 1% of all cases), particularly in older people, and those with other underlying liver disease (such as infection with hepatitis B or C). It is thought to be due to the immune mechanisms rather than infection levels.

Diagnosis

Blood tests are required to confirm the diagnosis.

Treatment

There is no specific medication to treat hepatitis A. Medications to relieve symptoms should only be used under medical advice as they may contribute to damage of the liver.

Prevention

Prevention is through **hygiene**, careful selection of **food and water**, and **vaccination**.

Good hygiene, and choosing safe food and water are important, especially in areas where hepatitis A is common:

- Maintain a high level of personal hygiene, including during sexual activity.
- Do not drink tap water. Choose boiled or bottled water from reputable sources, water that has been treated with chlorine or iodine, or carbonated beverages.
- Avoid ice, as it may have been made with unsafe water.
- Ask locally which restaurants and hotels serve safe food.
- Select food that has been thoroughly cooked while fresh and served very hot.
- Do not eat raw shellfish.

Vaccination is effective, widely available and generally recommended for any traveller who has not already had the vaccine (or the disease). Two doses, given six months apart, are required for lifelong immunity. All travellers should consider it, particularly:

- If travelling to areas with high rates of hepatitis A.
- When living conditions are crowded or have poor sanitation.
- Men who have sex with men.
- Illicit drug users.
- People with liver disease.

Postexposure prophylaxis: After exposure, people who are not immune may be recommended Hepatitis A vaccination or immune globulin (antibodies) as soon as possible (within two weeks) to prevent infection.

Risk to travellers

Hepatitis A is common in areas with limited access to sanitation. People who live with an infected person, men who have sex with men, illicit drug users and people with liver disease are at higher risk in any area.

US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [Hepatitis A Information](#)

European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) [Factsheet about hepatitis A](#)

Hepatitis B

Recommended for most travellers and international assignees, especially:

- For long-term or frequent visitors, and health-care workers.
- For adventurous travellers who travel to more remote locations.
- If possibility of new sexual partner, needle sharing, acupuncture, dental work, body piercing or tattooing during visit.

Many travel health professionals recommend hepatitis B vaccination for all travellers, regardless of destination.

The Disease

The hepatitis B virus, like HIV, is transmitted through contact with blood, blood products or body fluids. Modes of transmission include:

- Unprotected sexual intercourse
- Infected blood transfusions
- Needle sharing by IV drug users
- Use of unsterilized needles, syringes or equipment
- From mother to child during childbirth

Symptoms develop between 45 and 160 days after infection when the virus invades the liver causing fever, abdominal pain, nausea and loss of appetite. Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes) is a common feature and the urine may become dark.

There is no specific treatment and recovery usually takes about four weeks. Many individuals may have no symptoms but can still be infectious to others.

Approximately 1 in 10 of those infected do not recover fully and suffer ongoing liver damage called chronic hepatitis B - this can eventually cause liver cirrhosis and/or cancer. The very young and the elderly are more likely to develop a chronic infection.

Vaccination

In many countries, hepatitis B is included in the routine childhood immunizations and need not be repeated. For unvaccinated travelers:

Routine schedule

- Individual hepatitis B vaccination requires a series of three injections given on days zero, 30 and after 6-12 months.
- A combined vaccine for hepatitis A and B is available in many countries. It also requires a series of three injections given on days zero, 30 and after six months.

Accelerated schedule

Can be used for travelers who will depart before the first two doses of the routine schedule can be given:

- Use an *individual* hepatitis B vaccine
- Doses on days 0, 7 and 21
- Fourth dose required after 6 months

Accelerated combined hepatitis A and B vaccine

- Doses on days 0, 7 and 21
- Fourth dose of hepatitis B alone or the combined vaccine required after 12 months

[Watch the Hepatitis Video Podcast](#) (Vimeo)

[View Viral Hepatitis Infographic Poster](#) (PDF)

The Disease

Hepatitis B is a viral disease affecting the liver. It is transmitted through contact with blood, blood products or body fluids of an infected person. It can cause a mild illness but occasionally can develop into a chronic illness.

Transmission

The hepatitis B virus, like HIV, is transmitted through contact with blood, blood products or body fluids (e.g. semen, saliva) on broken skin. Modes of transmission include:

- Unprotected sexual intercourse with an infected partner
- Infected blood transfusions
- Needle sharing by IV drug users
- Use of unsterilized needles, syringes or equipment
- From mother to child during childbirth
- Contact with wounds of an infected person

The virus remains viable outside the body on any surface for about seven days and can lead to infection. Blood spills including dried blood can be infectious.

Symptoms

Symptoms develop between 30 and 180 days after exposure to infection. Hepatitis B can either be acute (short term illness) or chronic (long term illness). Most people will not develop symptoms during the acute phase. Others experience fever, pain in muscles and joints, abdominal, nausea and loss of appetite. Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes) is a common feature and the urine may become dark. Recovery may take several weeks.

Risk of chronic illness is related to age. Babies who get infected from their mothers or those that get infected before five years of age are very likely to develop chronic infection. Less than 5% of adults and about 90% of children may develop chronic infection. In chronic illness, virus continues to remain in the body although people do not have symptoms. Many individuals may appear healthy but can spread the infection to others. Life threatening conditions such as liver cirrhosis and/or cancer may develop.

Diagnosis

The disease can be confirmed by blood tests.

Treatment

There is no specific cure for the disease. Treatment is mainly supportive, consisting of rest, adequate nutrition and medications to reduce discomfort.

Prevention

Avoid direct contact with body fluids.

Vaccine: This can prevent the illness and its serious outcomes such as cirrhosis and cancer. In many countries, hepatitis B vaccination is included in the routine childhood immunizations.

Risk to Travellers

Most travellers are at low risk unless they have contact with the infected blood or body fluids.

[CDC Hepatitis B information](#)

Japanese encephalitis

Vaccine is recommended for people who will participate in 'higher risk' activities while in an area where Japanese encephalitis risk exists.

You are engaging in a 'higher risk' activity if you:

- Travel during the peak Japanese encephalitis season (consult the "Health Threats" section of the International SOS country guides to see specific season details for this country).
- Spend a significant amount of time outdoors, particularly in the evening and night-time, in areas outside of cities. (ex. camping, trekking, biking, fishing, hunting, farming).
- Stay in accommodation that will likely have mosquitoes indoors, ex. lacking air conditioning, window screens, and bed nets.
- Spend a month or more in a risk area during transmission season.

Japanese encephalitis vaccine is not available in many of the risk countries. Have the complete vaccine series before departure.

Japanese encephalitis is serious viral illness, spread by mosquitoes. It occurs in most of Asia as well as some parts of the Western Pacific, mostly in rural agricultural areas. Although many people won't have any symptoms, it can cause encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) with permanent brain damage, or be fatal. Prevention is through preventing mosquito bites. In addition, vaccination is recommended for travellers at higher risk.

The Disease

Japanese encephalitis (JE) is serious illness, caused by a virus from the *Flavivirus* family. It is the most common cause of encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) in Asia, affecting children in particular. Spread by mosquitoes, it occurs in most of Asia as well as some parts of the Western Pacific, mostly in rural agricultural areas.

Transmission

The JE virus lives in animal hosts, mostly pigs and wading birds. It is transmitted between these animals by the *Culex* mosquito, which breeds where there is abundant water, such as in rice paddies. *Culex* mosquitoes are night feeders, so there is less chance of JE transmission during the day. Humans are infected when they are bitten by a mosquito carrying the JE virus. However humans are a "dead-end" host and mosquitoes generally don't become infected through biting people, as the level of virus in humans is low.

Symptoms

Most people who are infected have no symptoms. However about 1% of people will develop encephalitis about 5 to 15 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito. Symptoms usually start suddenly, with fever, headache and vomiting. Severe cases can develop weakness, movement disorders or paralysis. Confusion, drowsiness, seizures and coma can occur. About 20 to 30% of severe cases are fatal, while 30 to 50% of survivors will have permanent brain damage.

Diagnosis

The diagnosis is suspected based on symptoms and travel history. It is confirmed by a specific blood test, or a laboratory test on spinal fluid.

Treatment

No specific treatment is available and management consists of supportive measures.

Prevention

All travellers should take steps to prevent being bitten by mosquitoes.

- When outdoors, use an insect repellent.
- When indoors, use knock-down insect spray, and sleep under mosquito nets.
- Stay in accommodation with air conditioning and window screens.

See the article [Preventing mosquito bites](#) in the International SOS Location Guides for further details.

Vaccination against JE is available, and may be recommended for some travellers at higher risk of infection.

Risk to travellers

See [CDC Japanese Encephalitis Distribution Map](#)

Mostly, the risk to travellers is low, especially short term-visitors and those who only visit urban areas. However the risk is higher for people who stay longer than a month; those who travel to rural areas; those participating in extensive outdoor activities; and those who stay in accommodations without air conditioning, screens, or bed nets.

In areas where JE occurs, the risk of infection is often seasonal, being highest in summer / fall, during rainy seasons or varying with irrigation of crops. In temperate regions such as China, Japan and Korea, Japanese encephalitis transmission is highest from May to September. In northern India and Nepal, peak transmission is from September to December. In tropical regions of Asia and Oceania, Japanese encephalitis occurs year-round. *See individual location information for more details.*

[CDC Japanese Encephalitis Information](#)

Measles

- Recommended for all travellers and international assignees.
- All travellers should be up to date with their measles vaccination (schedule differs by country). Vaccination for adults is available as MMR (measles, mumps and rubella), two doses given at least four weeks apart are required.

Some individuals [cannot be vaccinated](#) due to certain health conditions.

Measles is a highly contagious viral disease that can have serious complications.

Transmission

Measles spreads very easily when an infected person talks, coughs, or sneezes, releasing droplets into the air. If a healthy person breathes in these droplets, they can get sick. The virus can stay in the air and infect people for up to 2 hours after the infected person has left. It can also land on objects and surfaces, where it can live for several hours. If you touch these surfaces and then touch your face, you can get infected.

A person with measles is infectious from four days before the appearance of the rash until four days after it has appeared. After being exposed to the virus, approximately 90% of people who are not immune will become infected.

Symptoms

Measles symptoms usually start 7-14 days after being exposed to the virus. Early signs include a high fever, cough, runny nose, and red, watery eyes. Small white spots, known as Koplik's spots, may appear inside the mouth. A few days later, a red, blotchy rash starts on the face and spreads to the rest of the body.

Measles can lead to serious complications, especially in young children, adults over 20, pregnant women, and people with weakened immune systems. Common complications include ear infections and diarrhea. More severe complications can be pneumonia, which is a lung infection, and encephalitis, which is swelling of the brain. These severe complications can sometimes be fatal.

Pregnant women who contract measles have an increased chance of miscarriage and pre-term delivery. Their babies may also experience low birth weights and birth defects.

Diagnosis

This illness is usually diagnosed clinically. If necessary, a lab test can confirm measles.

Treatment

There is no particular treatment for measles. Symptoms can be managed with over-the-counter preparations, good nutrition and adequate fluid intake. Antibiotics are required if there are bacterial complications (such as pneumonia, ear infection). Sick people should be isolated from non-immune people, and should not go out in public until at least four days after their rash appears.

Prevention

Measles can be effectively prevented by vaccination, which many countries routinely administer during childhood. The MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) vaccine is highly effective and safe, providing lifelong immunity for most people after two doses. Vaccination not only protects individuals but also helps prevent the spread of the virus within communities.

People who are not immune and are at higher risk for complications (such as pregnant women, unvaccinated infants and people with weakened immune systems) may be given a dose of antibodies if exposed to the virus.

In addition to vaccination, good hygiene practices, such as regular handwashing and avoiding close contact with infected individuals, can help reduce the risk of transmission.

Risk to Travellers

Measles occurs throughout the world. Outbreaks are common in areas where there is low vaccination coverage. Measles is highly contagious and can spread quickly in places where people gather, such as airports and tourist destinations. Anyone who has not been immunised, or has not previously had measles, is at risk of infection.

- International SOS article on [measles, mumps and rubella vaccination](#)
- [CDC Measles Information](#)
- See routine childhood vaccination schedules: [Australia](#), [Canada](#), [Europe](#), [USA](#), [UK](#)

Typhoid fever

Recommended for adventurous and long-term travellers, especially those who will:

- Visit friends and relatives.
- Eat from local vendors or restaurants.
- Be exposed to conditions of poor sanitation.
- Visit smaller cities or rural areas.

Typhoid fever is a serious infection caused by *Salmonella typhi* bacteria. People are infected through ingesting contaminated food or water. Choosing safe food and water and vaccination reduces the risk of developing the disease.

Symptoms usually begin one to three weeks after exposure. Although typhoid fever is often called a diarrhoeal disease, some patients do not have diarrhoea. Persistent, high fever is typical. Other early symptoms are flu-like: body aches and pains, weakness, loss of appetite and a continuous dull headache. A rash with pink spots may appear on the chest and abdomen of some patients. In severe cases, perforation of the bowel can cause severe bleeding or infection in the abdomen, which can be fatal.

Typhoid is treated with antibiotics. However there is a growing problem of antibiotic resistance. "Extensively drug-resistant" (XDR) typhoid is present in some locations and does not respond to many of the antibiotics which are usually used against typhoid, making preventive measures even more important. Vaccination is recommended for people travelling to locations where typhoid is consistently present.

The Disease

Typhoid fever is a serious infection caused by *Salmonella Typhi* bacteria. It spreads either through intake of contaminated food or water or close contact with an infected person. Raw fruit and vegetables, and shellfish are often associated with typhoid.

Symptoms

The symptoms usually begin seven to 21 days after exposure. The typical feature of the disease is persistent high fevers. While typhoid fever is often called a diarrhoeal disease, not all patients have diarrhoea. Symptoms include high fever, body aches and pains, weakness, stomach ache, loss of appetite, cough and diarrhoea or constipation. Some people may develop a rash. If left untreated, symptoms worsen and life threatening complications may develop.

Some people can carry the bacteria without any symptoms ("carriers") and are a source of infection.

Diagnosis

Lab tests done on blood, stool and urine samples help diagnose the illness.

Treatment

Typhoid is treated with antibiotics. However there is a growing problem of antibiotic resistance. "Extensively drug-resistant" (XDR) typhoid is present in some locations and does not respond to many of the antibiotics which are usually used against typhoid, making preventive measures even more important.

Prevention

Typhoid is prevented through careful selection of safe food and water and vaccination. Maintaining hygiene measures and choosing safe food and water is important because typhoid vaccines do not provide complete protection.

- Maintain a high level of personal hygiene; wash hands frequently with soap and water.
- Drink only bottled or treated water or hot beverages.
- Select safe food. Meals should be thoroughly cooked and served hot. Avoid under-cooked or raw meat, fish or shellfish. Eat only fruit that you peel yourself.

Vaccination is recommended people travelling to locations where typhoid is consistently present.

Primary vaccination

Primary vaccination and booster doses for typhoid are the same. They can be either:

- A single injection.
- A series of three or four oral capsules taken on alternate days (differs country-to-country).

Booster

- After injected typhoid vaccination (Vi), a booster may be recommended at 2-3 years.
- After oral typhoid vaccination (three capsules), a booster may be recommended at 3-5 years.
- After oral typhoid vaccination (four capsules), a booster may be recommended at 3-5 years.

Risk to Travellers

High-risk areas are those with poor hygiene and sanitation and limited access to safe water. The disease is common in destinations such as the Indian subcontinent and other developing countries in Asia, Africa and Central and South America.

[CDC Typhoid information](#)

Routine Vaccinations

COVID-19

All travelers should ensure they are up to date with COVID-19 vaccinations. Recommendations vary between countries.

Influenza

Annual vaccination is recommended. Vaccination is especially important for people at higher risk of severe disease, including::

- Young children
- Pregnant individuals
- People 65 years and older
- People with underlying health conditions

Measles-Mumps-Rubella

Vaccinations against measles, mumps, and rubella are routine in childhood, and are usually available as a combined vaccine "MMR".

Everyone should be immune to these diseases before travel.
There are outbreaks of measles in many locations.
If you are unsure of your immunity, consult your doctor well in advance of travel.
See routine childhood vaccination schedules: [Australia](#), [Canada](#), [Europe](#), [USA](#), [UK](#)

Polio

Vaccination against polio is routine in childhood in many countries. See routine childhood vaccination schedules: [Australia](#), [Canada](#), [Europe](#), [USA](#), [UK](#)
All adults should ensure they are immune to the disease before they travel abroad. If unsure of your immunity, consult your health professional. You may need a *primary vaccination* or a *booster*. Booster recommendations vary by country.

Tetanus-Diphtheria-Pertussis

Vaccinations against tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis are routine in childhood.
See routine childhood vaccination schedules: [Australia](#), [Canada](#), [Europe](#), [USA](#), [UK](#)
All adults should ensure they are immune to these diseases before they travel abroad. If unsure of your immunity, consult your health professional. You may need a *primary vaccination* or *booster*. Booster recommendations vary by country.

Varicella

Varicella (chickenpox) vaccinations are included in the routine childhood immunization schedule of some countries. See routine childhood vaccination schedules: [Australia](#), [Canada](#), [Europe](#), [USA](#), [UK](#)
All adults should ensure they are immune to varicella before they travel abroad. If unsure of your immunity, consult your health professional.

Health Threats

Known health threats for this country

Hantaviruses

Hantaviruses are a group of viruses that belong to the *bunyaviridae* family. They can cause two different types of illness in humans: Haemorrhagic Fever with Renal Syndrome (HFRS) involves the kidneys while Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS) involves the respiratory system. Regardless of which illness they cause, hantaviruses are carried by infected rodents. Virus is present in the animal's saliva, urine and faeces. Droplets of these excretions can contaminate the air in a process called aerosolisation. Humans become sick when they inhale the virus.
The incubation period of HPS is not positively known. Limited data suggests that people become sick within one to eight weeks after being exposed to the virus. The incubation period for HFRS is usually 1 to 2 weeks after exposure but could be as long as 8 weeks.
Initial symptoms of HPS include fatigue, fever, and muscle aches. About 50 percent of HPS patients also experience headache, dizziness, and abdominal symptoms (nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, pain). The "late stage" symptoms of HPS are cough/shortness of breath and a feeling of overall tightness in the chest. Heartbeat and breathing may both become rapid at this stage of illness. Symptoms of HFRS appear suddenly and include intense headaches, back and abdominal pain, fever, chills, nausea and blurred vision. As the disease progresses, patients may develop flushing of the face, inflammation, redness of the eyes or a rash. Later symptoms include bleeding from the skin, conjunctiva of the eye, and mouth. In the most severe cases renal failure develops.
There is no specific treatment or cure. Patients are treated supportively, meaning their symptoms are addressed even though the disease itself cannot be cured. Patients usually require hospitalisation in an intensive care unit. An antiviral medication, ribavirin, may be used to treat the HFRS although its effectiveness has not been proven in HPS.
There is no vaccine for HPS. Vaccines against HFRS are being used in many Asian countries. The best way to avoid infection is to eliminate rodents from your living space and worksite, and/or avoid contact with them. Keep food in tightly sealed containers, clean dishes immediately after use, do not leave pet food out all day, and seal holes to the outside – generally, make your environment inhospitable to rodents.

Rabies

Rabies is a viral disease contracted when bitten or scratched by an infected (rabid) animal, often a dog. Once it enters the body, the virus travels along nerves and causes paralysis. As it reaches important organs like the spinal cord and the brain, it causes coma and death.

In countries where rabies is present in animals or bats, ALL animal / bat bites, scratches and licks to broken skin must be treated seriously. Rabies vaccination is very effective in preventing rabies, even after a bite/scratch by a rabid animal.

Rabies vaccination

Pre-exposure vaccination is often recommended for expatriates and long-term visitors to destinations where rabies is present. It's especially recommended if quality medical care may not be available after being bitten or scratched by an animal. Pre-exposure treatment can be especially useful for children, since they may not tell their parents that they have been bitten/scratched.

Pre-exposure vaccination makes it easier to treat a bite or scratch. That's important because some types of rabies treatment can be in short supply in many countries, even in cities.

If bitten, scratched or licked (on broken skin) by an animal:

- Immediately cleanse the wound with soap and water and a povidone-iodine solution if available.
- Seek medical advice from a qualified source or your assistance company.
- Notify local health authorities immediately. You may need *post-exposure vaccination*, even if you have had pre-exposure vaccination. (THIS CAN BE LIFE SAVING.)

Japanese encephalitis

Japanese encephalitis is serious viral illness, spread by mosquitoes. It occurs in most of Asia as well as some parts of the Western Pacific, mostly in rural agricultural areas. Although many people won't have any symptoms, it can cause encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) with permanent brain damage, or be fatal. Prevention is through preventing mosquito bites. In addition, vaccination is recommended for travellers at higher risk.

Lyme disease

Lyme disease occurs in North America, Europe and Asia. It is transmitted to humans by the bite of a particular species of tick. Lyme disease can cause an expanding rash at the site of the bite, fever, arthritis and nerve problems such as facial palsy.

To prevent tick bites:

- Avoid tick habitats
- Use insect repellents
- Check daily for ticks

Lyme disease vaccination is no longer available.

If you develop a rash at the site of a tick bite or other symptoms of Lyme disease, seek medical attention. A course of antibiotics can cure Lyme disease.

Malaria

Malaria is transmitted by mosquitoes that usually bite from dusk to dawn. Symptoms can develop as early as seven days or as late as several months after exposure. Early malaria symptoms are flu-like and can include fever, sweats/chills, head and body aches, and generally feeling tired and unwell. People also sometimes feel nauseous and vomit or have diarrhoea. Untreated, malaria can cause serious complications like anaemia, seizures, mental confusion, kidney failure and coma. It can be fatal.

Follow the ABCDEs to minimise malarial risk:

A: Awareness - Be **Aware** of the risk, the symptoms and malaria prevention.

B: Bite Prevention - Avoid being **Bitten** by mosquitoes, especially between dusk and dawn.

C: Chemoprophylaxis - If prescribed for you, use **Chemoprophylaxis** (antimalarial medication) to prevent infection and if infected reduce the risk of severe malaria.

D: Diagnosis - Immediately seek **Diagnosis** and treatment if a fever develops one week or more after being in a malarial area (up to one year after departure).

E: Emergency - Carry an **Emergency** Standby Treatment (EST) kit if available and recommended (this is the kit which contains malaria treatment).

Scrub typhus

The bacterial disease scrub typhus is also known as tropical typhus or "chigger fever". Humans become infected when bitten by disease-carrying mites. A lump develops at the bite site. It ulcerates and forms an eschar (like a cigarette burn). Glands near the bite swell. Sudden onset symptoms progress, including high fever, headaches and sore muscles. About a third of those infected develop a rash.

Complications, such as pneumonia and nervous system impairment, can occur. Treatment with timely appropriate antibiotics will cure the disease. Untreated, mortality can be as high as 30 percent. No vaccine is available. Prevent infection by avoiding mite habitats (such as rodent infested areas, recently cleared forests clearings and rice paddies) and by preventing mite bites.

Air Pollution

Poor air quality, also known as "haze", "smog" and "air pollution", can negatively impact one's health. Some groups are especially vulnerable to problems caused by polluted air. These include children, the elderly and anyone with underlying chronic health problems such as heart disease, emphysema, bronchitis or asthma.

The chemicals in polluted air can affect the lungs resulting in wheezing, coughing, shortness of breath and even pain. Polluted air can also irritate the eyes and nose, and may interfere with immune system function. Long-term exposure can result in reduced lung function, particularly in children. It can also lead to lung cancer.

Limiting exposure to polluted air is the best way to prevent health problems. When air quality is poor, it may be advisable to avoid outdoor physical activities. While indoors, keep doors and windows closed, and use an air conditioner on 'recirculate' if possible. If the air quality is frequently problematic, consider using an air cleaner. During particularly bad periods, you may want to wear a mask while outside. Ask your healthcare provider before using a mask, especially if you have underlying health conditions.

See the International SOS [Air Pollution website](#) - use your membership number to log in.

Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is a viral disease that causes liver inflammation. The virus is present in the faeces of an infected person. It spreads through contaminated food and water and is common in areas with poor sanitation. Person-to-person spread also occurs, when the virus is inadvertently transferred into the mouth, including during sexual activity. People at higher risk of infection include men who have sex with men, illicit drug users and people with liver disease.

Not everyone gets symptoms. If symptoms do occur, they begin two to four weeks or more after infection and can last for weeks or months. Symptoms include fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, diarrhoea, nausea/vomiting, abdominal pain/discomfort, jaundice (yellow colour of the skin and eyes), dark urine, clay-coloured stool, joint pain and itching. Many infected people suffer only a mild illness. Most cases recover fully after four or more weeks. However, for some, the disease can be severe, and occasionally is fatal. There is no specific treatment and cases are managed through supportive therapy.

Prevention is through vaccination, attention to hygiene, and access to safe food and water.

Travellers diarrhoea

Travellers' diarrhoea is the most common travel-related illness. It usually occurs within the first week away from home. It is spread through contaminated food and water.

Prevention is through choosing safe food and water, and paying attention to hygiene. Select food that is thoroughly cooked while fresh and served hot. Avoid undercooked or raw meat, fish or shellfish. Avoid salad and raw vegetables unless you can wash them with clean (treated) water and you peel them yourself.

Unless you are certain that the tap water is drinkable - choose bottled water and beverages, avoid ice.

Typhoid fever

Typhoid fever is a serious infection caused by *Salmonella typhi* bacteria. People are infected through ingesting contaminated food or water. Choosing safe food and water and vaccination reduces the risk of developing the disease.

Symptoms usually begin one to three weeks after exposure. Although typhoid fever is often called a diarrhoeal disease, some patients do not have diarrhoea. Persistent, high fever is typical. Other early symptoms are flu-like: body aches and pains, weakness, loss of appetite and a continuous dull headache. A rash with pink spots may appear on the chest and abdomen of some patients. In severe cases, perforation of the bowel can cause severe bleeding or infection in the abdomen, which can be fatal.

Typhoid is treated with antibiotics. However there is a growing problem of antibiotic resistance. "Extensively drug-resistant" (XDR) typhoid is present in some locations and does not respond to many of the antibiotics which are usually used against typhoid, making preventive measures even more important. Vaccination is recommended for people travelling to locations where typhoid is consistently present.

HIV, Hepatitis B and C, and STIs

HIV/AIDS, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C are spread by contact with bodily fluids (especially blood and semen).

- unprotected sex,
- needle sharing during IV drug use, or
- unsafe blood or medical/dental instruments.

Genital herpes (HSV), genital warts (HPV), gonorrhoea, chlamydia, syphilis and most other sexually transmitted diseases are spread by genital contact.

Prevention:

- In many countries, hepatitis B is now a routine childhood immunisation and need not be repeated. All non-immune travellers should consider vaccination.

- Always use new condoms (preferably brought from your home country).
- IV drug users should not share needles.
- Avoid having tattoos or piercings done.
- In healthcare settings, make sure that needles and syringes are sterile and not shared between patients.
- Call International SOS or your corporate medical department if you are hospitalised.
- Be aware of your risk when assisting anyone with an injury. Protect yourself from contact with bodily fluids.
- Seek medical attention within 24 hours if you accidentally come into contact with someone else's bodily fluids.

Hepatitis B

The Disease

The hepatitis B virus, like HIV, is transmitted through contact with blood, blood products or body fluids. Modes of transmission include:

- Unprotected sexual intercourse
- Infected blood transfusions
- Needle sharing by IV drug users
- Use of unsterilized needles, syringes or equipment
- From mother to child during childbirth

Symptoms develop between 45 and 160 days after infection when the virus invades the liver causing fever, abdominal pain, nausea and loss of appetite. Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes) is a common feature and the urine may become dark. There is no specific treatment and recovery usually takes about four weeks. Many individuals may have no symptoms but can still be infectious to others.

Approximately 1 in 10 of those infected do not recover fully and suffer ongoing liver damage called chronic hepatitis B - this can eventually cause liver cirrhosis and/or cancer. The very young and the elderly are more likely to develop a chronic infection.

Vaccination

In many countries, hepatitis B is included in the routine childhood immunizations and need not be repeated. For unvaccinated travelers:

Routine schedule

- Individual hepatitis B vaccination requires a series of three injections given on days zero, 30 and after 6-12 months.
- A combined vaccine for hepatitis A and B is available in many countries. It also requires a series of three injections given on days zero, 30 and after six months.

Accelerated schedule

Can be used for travelers who will depart before the first two doses of the routine schedule can be given:

- Use an *individual* hepatitis B vaccine
- Doses on days 0, 7 and 21
- Fourth dose required after 6 months

Accelerated combined hepatitis A and B vaccine

- Doses on days 0, 7 and 21
- Fourth dose of hepatitis B alone or the combined vaccine required after 12 months

Measles

Food & Water

Generally safe

Food Risk

Food is safe in South Korea, especially in hotels and restaurants. There are many food stalls which are also safe.

Water and Beverages

Tap water is safe.

Malaria

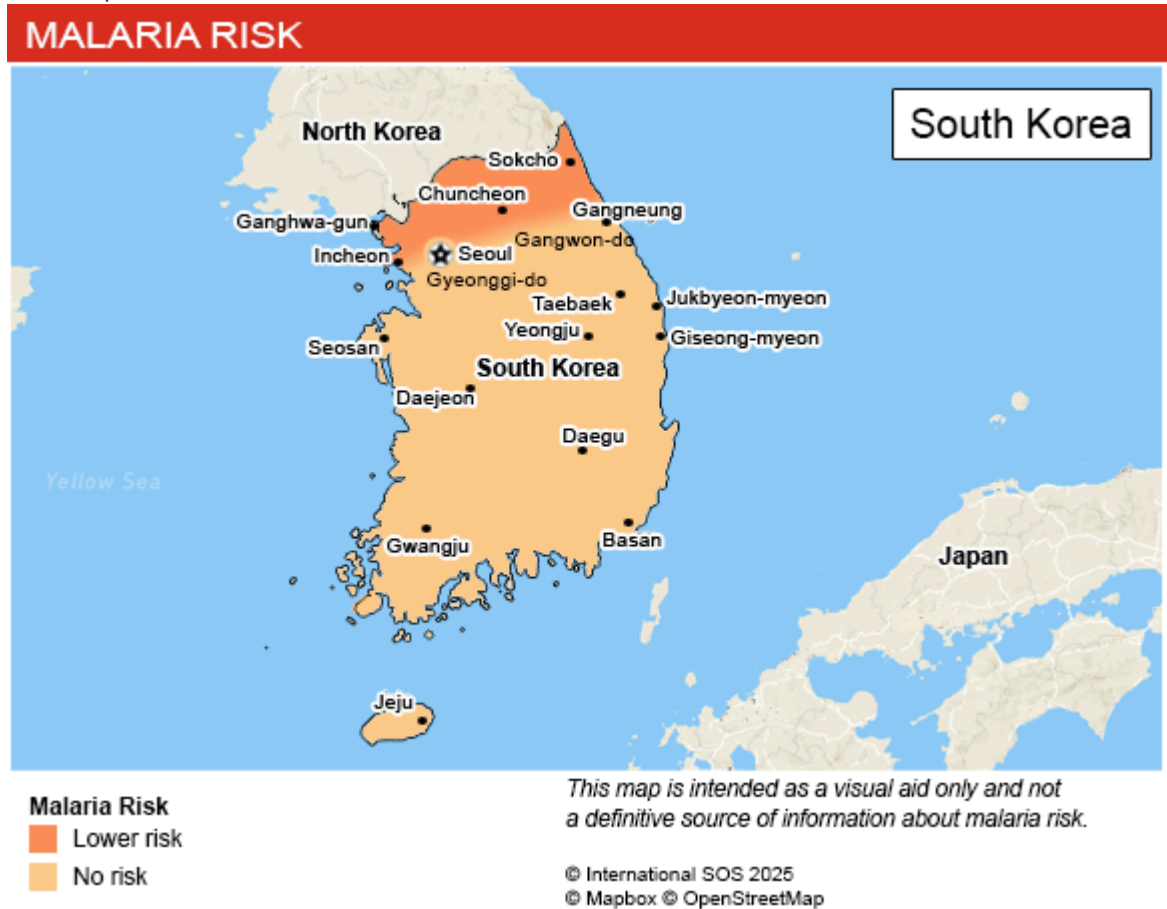
Limited risk

Malaria Bite Prevention

Limited risk of malaria is present (between March to December) in South Korea: rural areas in the northern parts of Kyonggi (Gyeonggi) and Kangwon (Gangwon) provinces, Incheon (towards the Demilitarized Zone [DMZ]).

Prevention:

- mosquito bite avoidance



Destination Guide for South Korea

Security Overview

Personal Security

STANDING TRAVEL ADVICE

- Take basic security precautions against petty and street crime.
- In the event of any demonstrations, rallies or strike activity, avoid the affected area as a security precaution. Localised clashes could occur between protesters and the police, particularly if the former attempt to block routes, march towards cordoned-off areas or breach security cordons around government buildings.
- In the event of any emergency drills, exercises or military manoeuvres, comply with all instructions issued by the security forces.
- Seek itinerary-specific advice prior to travel to the disputed north-western islands of Yeonpyeong, Baengnyeong, Daecheong, Socheong and Woo.

Crime

Petty crime rare

CRIME

The crime rate in South Korea is very low, though robberies and burglaries do occur and foreign nationals can be targeted, particularly in the capital Seoul, the city of Busan and Jeju Island. Violent crime and physical attacks, including sexual harassment, molestation and rape, are occasionally reported. Exercise caution if travelling alone at night. People can reduce the risk of falling victim to crime by adopting basic precautions.

Terrorism

Moderate indirect risk to foreign nationals

TERRORISM

There are no known terrorist groups operating in South Korea and the risk of terrorism from the North is low. Stringent security measures, however, have been implemented at major international airports to guard against the entry of suspected terrorists.

Social Unrest

SOCIAL UNREST

Trade unions, opposition parties and other groups regularly hold demonstrations in the centre of Seoul, particularly near Gwanghwamun Plaza, City Hall and Cheonggye in Jongno, a key business district, as well as Samgakji station in the Yonsan area, where the presidential office is located. These gatherings are mostly peaceful, though they can degenerate into localised scuffles between protesters and the police, particularly if participants attempt to disrupt traffic or break through police cordons.

The level of disruption associated with such protests is usually minimal if the gatherings remain contained to these locations, though participants have shown a propensity to march along main streets, which can cause traffic disruption in central Seoul. Nationwide strikes and related protests by healthcare workers against the government's plan to increase admissions to medical schools have been held throughout early 2024, causing localised transport disruption. Protests erupted across South Korea, particularly outside the parliament building in Seoul, on 4 December 2024 following the president's abrupt declaration of martial law. Thousands of demonstrators demanded his resignation while accusing him of anti-democratic actions.

Conflict

CONFLICT

North Korea

North Korea and South Korea's diplomatic relationship has been varied over the course of the constantly changing political landscape at the domestic and international levels. Domestic and international factors affecting inter-Korean relations include social and economic stability, the political affiliation of the South Korean ruling party and the standpoint of neighboring countries.

Since President Yoon Suk-yeol took office in May 2022, the tension between two Koreas has intensified. In its 2022 defence white paper, the South Korean government re-identified the North Korean regime and military as its 'enemy'. This expression had been removed from the previous government's version of the paper. In October 2024, North Korea revised its constitution to define South Korea as a 'hostile state'. North Korea's missile launches have also increased in quantity and quality in recent years, having developed intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) which are capable of directly targeting continental US territory.

Former president Moon Jae-in's (in office 2017-22) administration attempted to improve relations with North Korea, signing of the Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Unification of the Korean Peninsula in April 2018. However, underlying bilateral tensions have persisted, as indicated by North Korea's demolition of the inter-Korea liaison office in Kaesong (North Korea) in June 2020.

North Korea has previously fired short-range ballistic missiles into the Sea of Japan (East Sea) to coincide with important dates and announcements. These missiles are below the threshold of weapons that North Korea had agreed to refrain from testing. South Korea still has thousands of soldiers stationed in the demilitarised zone (DMZ), supported by around 28,500 US troops. The US military headquarters is based in Pyeongtaek (Gyeonggi province), south of Seoul.

North Korea continues to urge the end of South Korea's participation in the US-South Korea joint military exercises, which are held annually between February and April and in August, and following any tightening of sanctions against North Korea by the international community. South Korean military's Defense Readiness Condition (DEFCON) level is currently at 4, which is the second lowest level and considered 'peacetime'.

There have been occasional clashes between South Korean and North Korean troops along maritime borders. The last major incidents were North Korea's November 2010 shelling on Yeonpyeong island that killed four people, including two civilians, and the March 2010 sinking of a South Korean navy vessel, killing at least 40 security force personnel (for which North Korea continues to deny responsibility).

Tensions briefly spiked in August 2015 after South Korea accused North Korea of planting land mines in the DMZ, which injured two South Korean soldiers. The situation escalated when North Korea fired an artillery shell at loudspeakers broadcasting anti-North Korean propaganda along the border, triggering retaliatory fire from South Korea. However, no damage or injuries were reported. Tensions eased after North Korea and South Korea reached an agreement after three days of high-level bilateral discussions in 2015.

After its first nuclear test in October 2006, North Korea in 2007 agreed to disable its nuclear facilities. Some sanctions against the country were lifted after it submitted a declaration of its nuclear activities and destroyed the cooling tower in its Yongbyon reactor in June 2008, though the process collapsed shortly after North Korea conducted a second nuclear test in May 2009.

North Korea has since conducted four more nuclear tests: February 2013, January 2016, September 2016 and September 2017. North Korea has a history of alternating threats and aggression with periodic conciliatory gestures and talks to strengthen its negotiating position and extract concessions from the international community. North Korea frequently conducts missile and nuclear tests around important anniversaries. Further such acts of provocation are likely as diplomatic relations on the Korean peninsula remain tense. However, the nature of escalation discernible from more than 50 years of brinkmanship indicates that tense diplomatic relations on the peninsula are not likely to translate into a major conflict.

Japan

South Korea and Japan continue to contest claims over the islets of Dokdo (Takeshima in Japanese). This dispute occasionally escalates, often because of domestic political considerations in either country.