

Travelling for Carnival

Follow our advice for a safe and healthy trip

Carnivals take place throughout the year; a popular carnival season falls between February and March. Careful preparation and planning helps you enjoy a safe and healthy carnival.

Key messages

- **Pregnant women considering travel to Zika risk countries should be aware of the risk that Zika virus may present. Before booking travel, pregnant women, their partners and anyone planning a pregnancy should check our [Country Information pages](#) for [Zika risk at their destination](#) and get advice from their GP, practice nurse or a travel clinic.**
- **Malaria advice and vaccine recommendations are also available on our [Country Information pages](#).**
- **Follow [insect bite avoidance advice](#) day and night.**
- **Get travel health insurance.**
- **Be safe - watch out for accidents, injuries and theft.**
- **Be [SunSmart](#) - protect your skin from the sun.**
- **Be responsible for your alcohol intake.**
- **Practise safer sex.**
- **See your GP, nurse, pharmacist or travel clinic or to see if you need malaria protection and to check all your recommended vaccines are in date before you go - it's never too late.**

Before travel

Check the [Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office \(FCDO\) website](#) for up-to-date safety advice and travel entry requirements for your destination.

Respiratory viruses, COVID-19 and seasonal influenza (flu) are a risk in many destinations worldwide. Carnival travellers need to take particular care to reduce their risk by following advice about [living safely with respiratory infections](#), including regular hand washing, covering your mouth and nose with tissues when you cough or sneeze and dispose of used tissues in a bin.

Insect and mosquito bites

[Mosquito spread](#) illnesses like [chikungunya](#), [dengue](#) and [Zika](#) are a risk in some tropical carnival destinations.

Dengue cases have increased worldwide in recent years, particularly in the Americas. Multiple countries in South and Central America are reporting major outbreaks of dengue. The [Caribbean region](#) is also reporting a significant increase. While most dengue infections are mild, severe dengue can occur.

Zika, is spread by the same type of mosquito as dengue (mainly feeding during daytime hours) and is usually a mild illness. A small number of cases have also been spread by sexual contact. While serious complications and deaths from Zika are rare, infection in pregnancy can cause birth defects known as [Congenital Zika Syndrome](#).

There is no drug or vaccine to prevent Zika. The only way to try and prevent infection is by avoiding mosquito bites or by avoiding regions with a known or potential Zika risk.

Pregnant women should discuss the suitability of travel to Zika risk countries and the potential risk that Zika virus may present with their health care provider.

Vaccines and malaria

See your doctor, nurse, pharmacist or travel clinic as soon as possible to discuss travel health advice, including any vaccine and malaria tablets recommendations, as appropriate. Malaria is a serious, potentially fatal, illness spread by night biting mosquitoes and antimalarial tablets are recommended for some regions of the world.

Please check the News and Outbreaks tabs on our [Country Information pages](#) for current updates and vaccine recommendations.

Travelling last minute? It's never too late to get advice: most vaccines can be given at short notice and antimalarial tablets, if recommended, can be started just before travel, including on the day you travel.

Travel health insurance

Many countries do not have reciprocal (shared) health care agreements with the United Kingdom (UK), so you must get comprehensive [medical insurance](#) (including cover for medical evacuation costs) before you go. Remember - tell your insurance company about any pre-existing conditions and medicines you are taking.

Medicines

Take a good supply of any regular medicines, as they may not be readily available. Fake drugs may be an issue, so it is always best to travel with your own supply of medicines. See our advice on [travelling with medicines](#) for more information.

First aid kits

Carry a [first aid kit](#) including painkillers, antiseptic, insect repellent and anti-diarrhoea tablets. These will be useful wherever you're going. If you're going to remote areas, take a kit with basic sterile medical equipment like needles and syringes. Then, if you need urgent treatment, you can ask your nurse or doctor to use this, as sterile equipment may not be available. These kits are usually available from travel clinics and larger chemists.

During travel

Food and water hygiene

Follow good [food and water hygiene advice](#). Diarrhoea is common in travellers and could spoil your trip. Avoid dehydration - drink plenty of water from a safe source and buy diarrhoea self-treatment medicine from a UK chemist before you go. If you have bloody diarrhoea, a fever or cannot keep fluids down, you must get urgent medical help.

Insect bites

Diseases spread by mosquitoes, such as [chikungunya](#), [dengue](#), [malaria](#), [yellow fever](#) and [Zika](#) are common in many popular carnival destinations. Some of these illnesses have no vaccines or drugs to prevent them, so avoiding mosquito bites is the only way to protect yourself. The 'Other Risks' section on individual [country pages](#) highlights specific insect spread risks in that region.

Follow [insect bite avoidance measures](#) day and night; use insect repellents, cover up, and sleep under an intact mosquito net if you are not staying in air-conditioned accommodation.

Remember, to prevent malaria, you may need to take antimalarial tablets too, if recommended.

Rabies

[Rabies](#), a fatal illness spread by animals, is reported in many countries celebrating carnival. You are at risk if an animal bites or scratches you, licks broken skin or spits in your face. Remember, it's not just wild animals that are a risk - any animal, including pets and domestic animals, can have rabies, so avoid contact with all animals. After an animal bite, scratch, or lick: wash any wounds thoroughly with soap and water and get urgent medical help.

Sun protection

The sun is likely to be much stronger in many carnival destinations. Try to keep cool, seek shade, drink plenty of water and avoid excessive alcohol. Limit your exposure; use an SPF 30 or above (UVA/UVB) sunscreen (reapply frequently), wear sunglasses, a hat and protective clothes. See NaTHNaC's [Sun protection information](#) for more advice.

Medical care

Many countries worldwide do not provide free healthcare. Private hospitals will not usually treat you unless you have proof that you can pay. Remember to contact your insurance and medical assistance company promptly if you are admitted to a clinic or hospital. Health facilities in remote regions or small islands may be very basic.

Sex, body piercing and tattoo risks

Carnival is a time for fun, but it's important to protect your health while enjoying yourself. Carry condoms and use one every time you have sex. This helps protect you from [sexually transmitted infections](#) (including HIV) which are more common in some parts of the world.

Think carefully before getting a tattoo or body piercing while you are away, as unhygienic equipment can pass on [HIV](#), [hepatitis B](#) and [hepatitis C](#). These serious infections can also be picked up by injecting illegal drugs.

Be aware that advice to prevent sexual transmission of Zika virus is different for men and women: [preventing Zika infection by sexual transmission](#).

Safety and security

Carnival destinations can experience high levels of crime and violence, especially in the bigger cities. Take care; be sensitive to your surroundings and alert to the risk of overcrowding and opportunistic crime. Avoid secluded areas and poorly lit places, try to avoid going out on your own - be vigilant at all times.

Try to get immediate police and medical assistance if you are the victim of any kind of attack, including sexual assault. The FCDO can offer [emergency help](#) for UK travellers abroad, including support after sexual assault abroad.

Road safety

Many carnival destinations have a high road accident rate and road quality can be poor. Avoid driving on unfamiliar and/or rural roads, especially at night and take care as a driver, passenger and pedestrian.

Water safety

Never swim after drinking alcohol or taking drugs, check water depth before jumping or diving into a pool and get local advice about currents and tides before swimming in the sea. Remember babies and children must always be supervised around water, swimming pools and at the beach. See [Water Safety on Holiday](#) for more advice.

You are at a risk of a water parasite called [bilharzia \(schistosomiasis\)](#) in many parts of the Caribbean, Central and South America, so freshwater swimming or wading in rivers, streams or lakes, is not advised. Swimming in chlorinated pools and in the sea does not put you at risk of bilharzia.

Drugs

You are strongly advised not to engage in any illegal drug use. Most Caribbean and Central and South American countries have very severe legal penalties for drug possession and/or use.

European countries may have less strict laws, but many are likely to be stricter than the UK.

After travel

If you have any symptoms, like fever, flu-like illness, a rash or persistent diarrhoea, get immediate medical help. Make sure your doctor knows which countries you visited for carnival.

If you travelled to malaria risk areas, an urgent malaria test (same day result) must be arranged. This is very important, even if you took antimalarial tablets and have been home for a while.

If you had unprotected sex while you were away or think you might have a sexually transmitted infection, HIV or other infection, see your GP or go to a [sexual health clinic](#) as soon as possible.

If you are pregnant and visited a country with a **risk** of Zika virus, you must get advice from your GP or midwife when you return to the UK, even if you have no symptoms and feel completely well.

Tell your doctor or midwife you recently travelled abroad and give details of every country you visited.

Resources

- [Diseases spread by insects and ticks in the American continent \(the Americas\)](#)
- [NHS: Sex activities and risk](#)
- [Pan American Health Organization: Risk Assessment for public health related to Dengue in the Americas Region](#)
- [Travellers' diarrhoea](#)
- [UK Health Security Agency: Zika virus sexual transmission advice](#)
- [UK Health Security Agency on behalf of the joint Human Animal Infections and Risk Surveillance \(HAIRS\) group: HAIRS risk assessment: Dengue](#)
- [World Health Organization: Dengue - Global situation](#)
- [Zika virus: Evaluating the risk to individual travellers](#)

REFERENCES

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