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Cruise ship travel

Advice for travellers who are planning a cruise ship holiday

Cruises are a popular holiday choice for all age groups. They bring together people from all over the world, in crowded, semi-enclosed environments. As international travel by UK residents continues to increase [1], more travellers are likely to choose to cruise.

Cruise ships occasionally report outbreaks of infections such as flu, COVID-19 or food / water-borne illnesses; and while most passengers have a safe and enjoyable holiday, pre-travel preparation is important to reduce the risk of health problems.

Advice for travellers

Before travel

COVID-19

Operators have taken steps to improve infection control, but cruise ships may still experience COVID-19 outbreaks [2]. [The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office \(FCDO\)](#) provide guidance of what to consider ahead of booking an international cruise; you should also check the protocols of the cruise operator you are booking with.

If your ship is affected by an outbreak of COVID-19 you may be required to quarantine on board or at a designated facility. If you do not follow the cruise operator protocols, you may be asked to disembark the ship [2].

You can [contact NaTHNaC by email](#) with COVID-19 related enquiries.

Medical care

Access to healthcare may be limited on-board. Research the medical facilities on the ship before booking your holiday.

[Comprehensive travel insurance](#) is essential for all cruise passengers. A full declaration of health conditions, all destinations, equipment, and planned activities should be made. Ensure that you are aware of what is and what is not included in your policy [2].

Pack enough supplies of all regular [medications](#) to last for the whole trip as well as possible travel delays. Advise the cruise company in plenty of time if you need any additional assistance or equipment. [Seasickness](#) is a common complaint; your pharmacist can advise you about anti-sickness medication before travel.

Vaccinations

Check our [country information pages](#) for current vaccine and health advice. See your GP, practice nurse, pharmacist or travel clinic (ideally four to six weeks before you go) to check your travel and routine vaccines are in date.

Ensure that you are up to date with your [COVID-19 vaccines](#) and consider having a [flu vaccine](#), particularly if you are in a [risk group](#).

If your cruise is visiting yellow fever risk areas, you will need to get advice from a specialist [yellow fever vaccination centre \(YFVC\)](#).

You can [e-mail NaTHNaC](#) with vaccination certificate enquiries.

Malaria

If the cruise itinerary indicates overnight stops in areas with [malaria](#), or you are ashore overnight in risk regions, antimalarials may be recommended [3]. You should take any recommended tablets as directed, finish the course, be meticulous about [insect bite avoidance](#) and get urgent medical attention for any [symptoms](#).

While travelling

Insect bites

Insect bites can cause irritation and spread infections like [dengue](#), [Zika virus](#) and [yellow fever](#). Reduce your risk by following [insect and tick bite avoidance advice](#) including regularly applying insect repellents.

Weather extremes

Cruises can involve extremes of weather and temperature, and many underestimate the risk of sun damage, especially in colder destinations. Follow [sun protection advice](#) including regular application of a high factor sunscreen and limiting time in the sun.

Illness/injury on-board

Infections, such as coughs and colds, can spread quickly on cruises [4]. Follow [good personal hygiene rules](#) and avoid close contact with other passengers who are unwell.

Outbreaks of gastrointestinal infections have been reported on cruise ships [5]. You can reduce your risk by carefully following [food, water, and personal hygiene precautions](#).

Falls, slips and trips are a hazard on cruises and can cause serious injury. Beware of wet, slippery decks and take extra care in rough and stormy weather. Excessive alcohol intake should be avoided.

Report any illnesses, particularly vomiting and diarrhoea, promptly to the ship's medical team.

If you become unwell on return home, for example with a fever, flu-like illness, or persistent cough, seek prompt medical advice and tell your doctor where you have travelled.

Resources

- [Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office: Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): international cruise ship travel](#)
- [Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office: Foreign travel advice](#)
- [TravelHealthPro: Cruises](#)
- [Yellow Fever Zone: Search YFVC](#)

References

1. [Home Office. Statistics relating to passenger arrivals in the United Kingdom since the COVID-19 outbreak, August 2022. Published 25 August 2022 \[Accessed 26 October 2022\]](#)
2. [Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office. Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): international cruise ship travel. Last updated 17 March 2022 \[Accessed 26 October 2022\]](#)

3. [UK Health Security Agency. Malaria prevention guidelines for travellers from the UK. Last updated 27 September 2022 \[Accessed 26 October 2022\]](#)
4. [Tardivel K, White, S, Kornlyo-Duong K. Cruise Ship Travel Chapter 8. Travel by Air, Land & Sea. Conveyance & Transportation Issues. 24 June 2019. In: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Health information for international travel 2020. Atlanta, CDC. \[Accessed 26 October 2022\]](#)
5. [Freeland A, Vaughan G, Banerjee S. Acute Gastroenteritis on Cruise Ships - United States 2008 - 2014. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 15 January 2016;65:1-5. \[Accessed 12 October 2022\]](#)