

17 Jan 2024

Lunar New Year: Travel advice

Celebrating the Lunar New Year abroad? Lunar New Year is a public holiday celebrated across several days in many countries worldwide

The Lunar New Year is celebrated in different ways in many countries and cultures throughout Asia and is variously also known as Chinese New Year, the Spring Festival, Tet and Seollal.

Celebrations officially start on 10 February 2024, with the festival likely to attract big crowds and international visitors. Large crowds increase risk of accidents and spread of infectious diseases such as colds, influenza (flu) pneumonia and other respiratory infections [1].

The World Health Organization (WHO) reported an increase in respiratory infections in Northern China in November 2023 [2]. However, this is likely to be driven by a seasonal upsurge in known respiratory pathogens, consistent with what is being seen worldwide.

[Avian influenza](#) (bird flu) is a virus in birds that can spread from infected birds to humans. Avian flu in humans is rare, but is reported worldwide, but particularly from China, and Southeast Asia [3] mainly in people with close contact with birds. To reduce your risk of avian influenza; avoid all contact with any birds, including wild birds (dead or alive) and domestic birds live birds in 'wet markets' in Asia and the Far East.

See [Avian influenza in China - Prevention advice for travellers](#) for more information.

[Zika](#) is usually a mild illness spread by mosquitoes which mainly feed during daytime hours in parts of Africa, Asia, the Pacific Islands, Central and South America and the Caribbean. A small number of cases have also been spread by sexual contact [4].

Infection is usually a short-lived flu like illness, sometimes with a rash and itchy skin, severe disease is unusual. Neurological (brain) problems such as Guillain-Barré syndrome have also been reported, although they are not common. While serious complications and deaths from Zika are rare, infection in pregnancy can cause birth defects known as [Congenital Zika Syndrome](#) (microcephaly and other congenital abnormalities) [4, 5].

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.

Advice for travellers

See also our [General advice for travellers](#) for information on how to protect yourself from travel related health hazards.

Before you travel

Check the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office [Foreign travel advice](#) for the country you are visiting. This advice includes safety and security, entry requirements and travel warnings for your destination.

Remember to get appropriate [travel insurance](#) and check that your policy covers all your travel plans.

Check health advice for your destination in our [Country Information pages](#).

If you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, check your risk of Zika in the 'Other Risks' section of our [Country Information pages](#) and see UKHSA's advice about [Zika and pregnancy](#) before you travel.

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

Arrange an appointment with your GP, practice nurse, pharmacist or travel clinic to make sure you are in-date for all recommended travel and routine UK vaccines, including [COVID-19](#), [flu](#) and [measles, mumps and rubella \(MMR\)](#).

Do not travel if you are unwell [2].

While you are away

To protect against respiratory infections:

- [Wash your hands often](#) with soap and running water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser containing at least 60% alcohol if soap and water not available. This is particularly important after taking public transport or being in public spaces.
- Avoid close contact with anyone who is unwell.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, dispose of tissue appropriately and wash hands.
- Avoid all contact with birds and animals (alive or dead).
- Follow [good food and water hygiene](#) rules and do not eat or handle undercooked or raw poultry, egg or duck dishes.

If you are visiting a country with a risk of insect spread illnesses, including Zika, reduce your risk by wearing long sleeves/trousers, applying insect repellent regularly and follow [insect and tick bite avoidance advice](#).

When you return

Get urgent medical attention if you are unwell on your return and share your travel history with your health professional [2]. If you develop fever and a cough within 14 days of travel, you should seek medical advice by calling your GP or [NHS 111](#).

See [Avian flu: Advice for travellers to China](#) for further advice about avian flu symptoms.

If you are pregnant and visited a country with a **risk** of Zika virus transmission, 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.

If you are pregnant and develop symptoms suggesting Zika virus infection while you are visiting or soon after return from a country with a **very low risk** or **negligible** Zika risk, you should also get medical advice and contact your GP on return.

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

Advice for health professionals

Health professionals advising UK residents planning to travel abroad to celebrate Lunar New Year can check our [Country Information pages](#) for destination specific health advice and vaccine recommendations.

Carry out a comprehensive [risk assessment](#) with travellers visit destinations with Zika virus transmission. See our factsheet [Zika: Evaluating the risk to individual travellers for more guidance](#).

See the 'Other Risks' section of our [Country Information pages](#) for specific Zika risk category recommendations for affected countries.

UK Health Security Agency provide [health advice for women returning form a country or area with risk for Zika virus transmission](#).

Health professionals should contact the local microbiology, virology or infectious diseases consultant for advice about returning travellers with fever/acute illness. Further advice is available for health professionals from the [Imported Fever Service](#).

Advice for health professionals on investigating and public health management of suspected Avian influenza is available from UKHSA: [Avian influenza: recognising risk exposures among symptomatic persons with recent international travel](#) and [Avian influenza: guidance for managing human cases](#).

Resources

- [European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control: Avian influenza](#)
- [Global risk of measles: travel reminder](#)
- [World Health Organization: Influenza \(avian and other zoonotic\) factsheet](#)
- [World Health Organization: Influenza updates](#)
- [UK Health Security Agency: Avian influenza: guidance, data and analysis](#)
- [UK Health Security Agency: Respiratory viruses](#)

References

1. [Government of Canada. Lunar New Year. Last updated 10 January 2023. \[Accessed 17 January 2024\]](#)
2. [World Health Organization. Disease Outbreak News. Upsurge of respiratory illnesses among children-Northern China. 23 November 2023. \[Accessed 17 January 2024\]](#)
3. [European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control Communicable disease threats report. Week 1. 6 January 2024. \[Accessed 17 January 2024\]](#)
4. [World Health Organization. Zika virus. 8 December 2022. \[Accessed 17 January 2024\]](#)
5. [UK Health Security Agency. Zika virus: symptoms and complications. Last updated 2 August 2017. \[Accessed 17 January 2024\]](#)