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Country Focus: Thailand

Visiting Thailand

Most travellers to Thailand have a safe and healthy trip, but being aware of possible hazards helps reduce your chance of illness or injury.

Potential hazards include contaminated food and water, rabies, respiratory infections, diseases spread by insects, traffic accidents and sun exposure.

Be alert about traffic safety and remember driving rules can be different. Make sure you are familiar with the road rules for Thailand.

[Respiratory viruses](#), including [Avian influenza](#) (bird flu), [COVID-19](#) and seasonal influenza ([flu](#)) are a risk in Thailand.

[Mosquito spread](#) illnesses like [chikungunya](#), [dengue](#), [Japanese encephalitis](#) and [Zika](#) are a risk in Thailand.

Dengue rates have increased worldwide in recent years, particularly in regions such as the Americas, the Pacific Islands and Asia [1] and Thailand experienced a significant rise in dengue cases in 2023 [1, 2]. While most dengue infections are mild, severe dengue can occur.

Zika, spread by the same type of mosquito as dengue, which mainly feed during daytime hours, is usually a mild illness. A small number of cases have also been spread by sexual contact [3]. 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) [3, 4].

Advice for travellers

Before you go

See our [Thailand](#) Country Information page for current health advice.

Check [Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office \(FCDO\): Thailand](#) country advice for safety and security information, and guidance about driving/transport risks. You can also [sign up for FCDO email updates about Thailand](#).

See your GP, practice nurse, pharmacist or travel clinic to make sure all your recommended travel and routine United Kingdom (UK) vaccines, including [polio, diphtheria and tetanus](#) and [measles, mumps and rubella \(MMR\)](#) are in date.

Consider having a [flu vaccine](#) before you travel. This is particularly important if you have an underlying health issue.

If you have any medical conditions, get advice from your GP or hospital specialist before you go, to help you manage your condition during your trip.

If you take regular medicines, see our advice about [travelling with medication](#). For certain medicines, such as controlled drugs, you may need to apply for a special permit. If you are unsure about your medicine, contact your nearest [Thai embassy or consulate](#).

If you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, discuss the suitability of travel. This is particularly important for infections such as Zika.

For more information about Zika and your risk see: [Zika virus: Evaluating the risk to individual travellers](#).

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

There is a risk of [rabies](#), a potentially fatal virus spread by animal bites and scratches, in Thailand [5, 6]. Although it is rare, rabies has been reported in travellers after their return from countries where rabies is common[7].

Be aware of your risk while you are away and get advice about the rabies vaccine before you go. If you have a course of rabies vaccine, remember to take your vaccine records with you.

Carry a basic [first aid kit](#) and get comprehensive [travel health insurance](#). Check out [FCDO insurance advice](#) and remember to pack your insurance documents.

While you are away

During your journey

Any long journey, including a long haul flight, can increase your risk of [venous thromboembolism \(VTE\)](#) / [deep vein thrombosis \(DVT\)](#) so:

- Walk around as much as possible.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Avoid putting hand luggage under the seat in front of you, as this restricts movement.
- Regularly flex and extend your ankles to encourage blood flow.
- Avoid tight clothes around your waist or legs.

Make sure you know the [signs and symptoms of VTE](#) and get emergency medical help if you have any symptoms.

In Thailand

Be aware of your [personal safety](#) at all times.

Check local and national government advice and FCDO country information regularly for updates.

Reduce your risk of insect spread illnesses, including chikungunya, dengue and Zika, by wearing long sleeves/trousers, applying insect repellent regularly and following [insect and tick bite avoidance advice](#).

Reduce your risk of respiratory infections by following basic good hygiene rules:

- Cover your nose and mouth when you cough and sneeze.
- Wash your hands [8].

Avoid all contact with birds, including wild and domestic birds (dead or alive) to help reduce your risk of avian influenza. Do not visit 'wet markets' which may sell live birds.

Temperature and humidity can be very high. Remember to drink plenty of fluids and [protect yourself from the sun](#) by wearing appropriate clothing, and sunglasses. Regularly apply high-factor sunscreen.

Take care with eating and drinking and [follow basic food hygiene rules](#).

Rabies

Remember:

- Avoid contact with all animals, even if you had a course of pre-travel rabies vaccine.
- Following a bite, scratch or any potential exposure, wash the wound site, follow immediate [first aid advice](#) and get urgent medical help, even if the wound/exposure appears trivial.
- Bats also carry rabies - if you find a bat in your bedroom, you must also get urgent medical advice.

When you return

If you are ill within weeks or even months of your trip, particularly if you have fever or flu-like symptoms and/or diarrhoea, get urgent medical help. Remember to tell your doctor you visited Thailand.

Rabies

If you had any kind of possible rabies exposure in Thailand, you must see your GP when you get back to the UK. Even if you had treatment in Thailand, you may need further rabies vaccine doses. Remember to bring any vaccine or treatment records to your appointment. If treatment was not started when you were away, your GP can get expert advice to see if you need to start it in the UK.

Zika

If you are pregnant and visited Thailand, you must get Zika advice from your GP or midwife when you return to the UK. This is even if you have no symptoms and feel completely well.

You must tell your doctor or midwife you recently travelled to Thailand (a country with a risk of Zika).

More information is available from UKHSA: [Zika virus: advice for women returning from areas with active transmission](#).

Resources

- [GOV.UK: Driving abroad](#)
- [NHS: Bird flu](#)
- [NHS: Can I take my medicines abroad?](#)
- [Sun protection](#)
- [Rabies risk worldwide: practical advice during rabies vaccine shortages](#)
- [UK Health Security Agency: Beat the heat: staying safe in hot weather](#)
- [UK Health Security Agency: Rabies: risks for travellers](#)
- [UK Health Security Agency: Zika and pregnancy](#)

References

1. [World Health Organization. Dengue - Global situation. 21 December 2023. \[Accessed 2 February 2024\]](#)
2. [US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Dengue in Asia and the Pacific Islands. 22 January 2024. \[Accessed 2 February 2024\]](#)
3. [World Health Organization. Zika virus. 8 December 2022. \[Accessed 2 February 2024\]](#)
4. [UK Health Security Agency. Zika virus: symptoms and complications. Last updated 2 August 2017. \[Accessed 2 February 2024\]](#)
5. [UK Health Security Agency. Rabies risks in terrestrial animals by country. Last updated 5 January 2023. \[Accessed 2 February 2024\]](#)
6. [Thanapongtharm W, Suwanpakdee S, Chumkaeo A et al. Current characteristics of animal rabies cases in Thailand and relevant risk factors identified by a spatial modeling approach. PLoS Negl Trop Dis. 2021 Dec 1;15\(12\). \[Accessed 2 February 2024\]](#)
7. [Gautret P, Diaz-Menendez M, Goorhuis A et al. Epidemiology of rabies cases among international travellers, 2013-2019: A retrospective analysis of published reports. Trav Med Infect Dis. 36. 2020 July August 36: 101766. \[Accessed 2 February 2024\]](#)
8. [UK Health Security Agency. Living safely with respiratory infections, including COVID-19. Remember the basics of good hygiene. Last updated 16 June 2022. \[Accessed 2 February 2024\]](#)