



Nicaragua: Special Health Considerations

The following summary* is to acquaint you with the general health considerations of travel to Nicaragua and the preventative measures which are recommended to help reduce the chance of illness or injury during the trip. Please read this information carefully and plan to receive the appropriate immunizations and malaria medication prior to your departure. All individuals who participate on a trip are strongly encouraged to seek the advice of a physician or other expert in the field of travel medicine in preparation for the trip.

While in Nicaragua, you may be exposed to potentially harmful diseases from a number of sources including: insects, contaminated food and water, or close contact with infected people. Using a combination of pre-travel immunizations, prophylactic medication against malaria, personal protective measures, and common sense will greatly minimize the risk of becoming ill during or after travel to Nicaragua.

Immunizations

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommends immunizations against the following diseases for a short-term (less than one month), rural travel in Nicaragua.

- **Hepatitis A:** a viral infection of the liver that may be transmitted by water or food contaminated by human waste or directly between people. Hepatitis A vaccine can provide protection at least two weeks prior to travel.
- **Typhoid:** a bacterial illness that may be transmitted by food or water contaminated by human waste and directly between people. Typhoid vaccine can provide protection three weeks prior to travel.
- Boosters of **tetanus-diphtheria, measles, mumps, and rubella.** (If applicable depending on individual's age and vaccination history.)

Healthcare providers and long-term travelers should consider Hepatitis B vaccine. Hepatitis B is a viral illness transmitted by sexual contact, contaminated needles/medical equipment, and blood products. It is not transmitted by casual contact, food, water, or insects.

Malaria is a parasite that is transmitted to humans by mosquitoes. These mosquitoes bite from dusk to dawn. Malaria can be a very serious illness and if left untreated can cause severe complications, including coma and death. It is very important to take an appropriate anti-malarial medicine to help prevent infection if bitten by a mosquito carrying malaria. Anti-malarial medications are taken before, during, and after travel to regions where transmission is possible. With the appropriate use of anti-malarial medications and personal protective measures to avoid mosquito bites, infection is unlikely. The CDC recommends chloroquine phosphate (ARALEN) 500mg for the prevention of malaria in

* This summary is for informational purposes. It is not intended to be used as a complete guide for the pre-travel health needs of individuals. You should discuss these health considerations with your healthcare provider. If your personal physician is unable to provide pre-travel health counseling, immunizations, or malaria medications, we can assist you with locating a specialized travel health clinic or physician in your area. You should begin receiving immunizations and advice at least four weeks prior to travel.

Nicaragua. This medication should be taken one week before arrival in Nicaragua; weekly while in Nicaragua, and for four weeks after departing from Nicaragua.

There may be side effects and contradictions to the above-mentioned vaccines and malaria medication. Individual recommendations may vary based on age, medical/health history, previous immunizations, and exact itinerary.

Personal Protective Measures are simple measures that will greatly reduce your chance of exposure to food and water-borne illness, disease carrying insects (including malaria infected mosquitoes), and injuries. These measures are very important because immunizations may not offer 100% protection against specific diseases.

You will have a health seminar as part of your orientation in Nicaragua. At that time, we will discuss in detail these personal protective measures. We will review with you the signs and symptoms of potential illnesses that should be reported to a trip leader. Below is a brief outline of points that should be taken into consideration:

- Water should be boiled, bottled (commercially), or purified. Bridges To Community will provide you with chlorinated water and individual water bottles with filters for use during the trip. Avoid ice, salads, uncooked vegetables, and dairy products. Foods containing meat, vegetables and rice should be eaten hot. Peel fruit immediately before eating (avoid pre-sliced and prepared fruit salads).
- Avoid getting bitten by mosquitoes, flies, fleas, ticks, and lice. There are many diseases (most are extremely rare in travelers) that can be transmitted by insects. Wear appropriate clothing, use insect repellents containing DEET (20-35%), and sleep in screened-off rooms or use mosquito netting. Please refer to your “packing list” for details.
- Avoid swimming in all fresh-water lakes, streams, and ponds. Swim only in well-maintained, chlorinated swimming pools and non-polluted ocean beaches.
- Use caution and common sense when driving or using public transportation. Road and traffic accidents are common because of poor road and vehicle conditions, overcrowded buses, and minimal safety regulations.
- HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis B, and other blood borne diseases are transmissible through sexual contact, infected blood products, and contaminated needles/medical equipment. In Central America sexual transmission accounts for the majority of cases of HIV and Hepatitis B. Transmission is **not** possible through casual contact, air, food, water, or insects.
- Animals should not be approached or handled. Rabies is common in domestic and some wild animals. Report any bites or licks from an animal immediately to a trip leader.

The summary of CDC information was prepared jointly by Dr. Warren Licht, Bridges board member, and Traveler’s Medical Service of New York. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the health considerations for travel to Nicaragua, please contact the Bridges to Community office.

You may also contact the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) for a more detailed summary of health risks and disease prevention for Central America. CDC voice/fax travel information is available at (404) 639-3311 or (800) 311-3435. You can also find current traveler information on the CDC’s website at www.cdc.gov/travel