

# International Travel for Humanitarians

**People who travel to provide humanitarian aid or disaster relief must first address their personal health and welfare, including knowledge and preparation for all the usual elements associated with travel to the area.**

## **Health, Safety and Security**

Pre-deployment education and training are essential, as personal illness or injury burdens the community the worker has come to support.

- Injuries and motor vehicle accidents are common risks for travelers anywhere in the world; thus, travelers should be sensitive to their surroundings and carefully select the type of transportation and hour of travel, if possible.
- In disaster and emergency situations, the traveler should also be aware of physical hazards such as debris, unstable structures, downed power lines, environmental hazards, and extremes of temperature.
- Travelers to conflict areas should be aware of landmines and other potential hazards associated with unexploded ordnance.

## **Personal Items**

Because of the loss of life, serious injuries, missing and separated families, and destruction often associated with disasters, humanitarian aid workers should recognize that situations they encounter may be extremely stressful. Keeping a personal item nearby, such as a family photo, favorite music, or religious material, can offer comfort in such situations. Checking in with family members and close friends from time to time is another means of support. Satellite telephones are small, can work almost anywhere in the world, and can be rented for <\$10 per day.

## **Important Documents**

In uncertain circumstances, extra passport-style photos may be required for certain types of visas or for additional work permits. Travelers should bring photocopies of important documents, such as passports and credit cards, as well as copies of their medical, nursing, or other professional license, if applicable. Medical information, such as immunization records and blood type, is also helpful to have. The traveler should carry these copies and also leave copies with someone back home. In addition, they should carry contact information for the person who should be notified in an emergency.

## **Registration with Embassies**

Travelers should enroll in the Department of State's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP, <https://step.state.gov/step/>) to register with the US embassy in the destination country before departure. This will ensure that the local consulate is aware of their presence, they can receive notifications, and they may be accounted for and included in evacuation plans. They should also consider supplemental travel, travel health, and medical evacuation insurance to cover medical care and evacuation should they become ill or injured.

### **Significant risks for humanitarians:**

Accidents and violence are documented risks for humanitarian workers and cause more deaths than disease and natural causes. Humanitarians should be mindful of the specific risks and situations listed below when traveling to provide aid.

- Exposure to the environment that precipitated or sustains a crisis or event, such as a natural disaster or conflict
- Working long hours under adverse or extreme conditions, often in close contact with the affected population
- Damaged or absent infrastructure, including limits in the availability of food, water, lodging, transportation and health services
- Reduced levels of security and protection
- Stress, ethical and moral challenges related to the event and the resource capacities of the situation

## Travel Health Kit for Humanitarians

In addition to the items listed in the general international travel health kit, humanitarian workers should consider the additions listed below.

### Toiletries

- Toothbrush/toothpaste
- Skin moisturizer
- Soap, shampoo
- Lip balm
- If corrective lenses are used:
  - Extra pair of prescription glasses in a protective case, copy of prescription
  - Eyeglass cleaning supplies and repair kit
  - Extra contact lenses and lens cleaner
- Razor, extra blades\*
- Nail clippers\*
- Toilet paper
- Menstrual supplies

### Clothing

- Comfortable, light-weight clothing
- Long pants
- Long-sleeved shirts
- Hat
- Boots
- Shower shoes
- Rain gear
- Bandana/handkerchief
- Towel
- Gloves (leather gloves for physical labor; rubber gloves if handling blood or body fluids)

### Activities of Daily Living

- Sunglasses
- Waterproof watch
- Flashlight
- Spare batteries
- Sewing kit
- Laundry detergent
- Small clothesline/pins
- Travel plug adapters for electronics
- Knife, such as a Swiss Army knife or Leatherman\*
- If traveling to an area where food or water may be contaminated:
  - Bottled water or water filters/purification system/water purification tablets
  - Nonperishable food items
    - If traveling to malaria-endemic areas: Personal bed Net (insecticide-impregnated)

### Contact a health-care provider

Regardless of the area of the world in which you will be deployed, you should discuss these basics with a health-care provider before travel:

- Routine vaccinations
- Malaria prophylaxis (if appropriate)
- Food and water precautions
- Self-treatment for travelers' diarrhea
- Risks from insect bites
- Injury prevention

Depending on the length of time away or your activities, returning aid workers may benefit from a complete medical review.

- Returning home has been identified as a risk period for difficulties in psychological adjustment
- Individuals who witnessed or have been involved in situations of mass casualties, deaths or serious injuries or who have been victims of violence should consider critical incident counseling.

### Safety and Security

- Money belt
- Cash
- Cell phone, equipped to work internationally, or satellite phone (with charger)
- Candles, matches, lighter in a Ziploc bag\*
- Ziplock bags
- Safety goggles

\* Pack these items in checked baggage, since they may be considered sharp objects and confiscated by airport or airline security if packed in carry-on bags.

For more information on international travel health, visit [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel).

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