



CRUISE SHIP TRAVEL

Cruise ship travel is increasingly popular. Despite its general safety, approximately 1 in 250 passengers will require some medical attention while onboard. To ensure the best possible cruise experience you should be well prepared and take some measures to prevent illness.

Pre-existing conditions

If you have difficulty walking, check with your travel agent or cruise line to make sure assistance for embarking and disembarking is available at all ports of call.

If you have a chronic illness or are recovering from a recent illness, be well prepared to continue your care while on board. If you are taking medications, be sure to bring an adequate supply with you including a few extra days if your return is delayed.

Have a written profile of your medical condition including current treatments, medications, and dosages that you can provide to the ship's physician if needed. Generally, the medical services on board are quite expensive so carry travel insurance that covers this possibility.

Infants and pregnant women

Many cruise lines will not accept infants younger than 6 months of age or women in their last three months of pregnancy. Verify this with the cruise line before committing to travel.

Health risks

Most health risks related to cruise ship travel are caused by large numbers of people coexisting in a confined space. Many passengers also come from other parts of the world and may carry diseases that are 'in season' in their particular region but not in yours. They may also carry diseases that you are rarely or never exposed to.

The best protection against disease is frequent hand washing.

Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water for 15-20 seconds or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Hands should be washed after toileting, after shaking hands, after handling money and before eating.

The most common on-board diseases you might be exposed to are:

Influenza

Respiratory infections are spread by airborne droplets generally through coughing and sneezing and can be life threatening particularly among the very young and the very old. We encourage all travelers to get the annual flu shot to minimize the risk of influenza.

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Norwalk-like virus infections

These are the viruses that cause gastric upsets with symptoms such as vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal cramps, and low fever. Such illnesses can spread through a ship very quickly because of the close living quarters. Symptoms appear in 12 to 48 hours and the disease runs its course in 1 to 3 days. The person may still be contagious up to three days after symptoms disappear.

Traveller's diarrhea

This may be caused by bacteria, a virus, or by eating native food in Ports-of-call. Generally, ships stake their reputation on their food and on board food is very safe. Unfortunately, it is both enticing and plentiful so some discipline may be needed.

Legionnaires' disease

This is a flu-like disease caused by contaminated water systems. Most outbreaks have been traced back to poor cleaning and maintenance practices of spas, fountains, showers, and air conditioning systems. The general risk of this disease is very low.

Motion sickness

The large modern ships are engineered to reduce motion sickness. If you have a history of problems in this regard, take appropriate medication with you.

Skin problems

Sunburn is common because exposure to the sun is more intense at sea. Cuts and scratches should be attended to and soothing eye drops may be needed if on-ship pools are heavily chlorinated.

Ports-of-call

Often the biggest danger to the traveller is presented in ports where ships dock for daily excursions. Make the travel clinic well aware of the stops associated with your itinerary. In many cases you are risking other diseases associated with that location including malaria, yellow fever, dengue fever, etc. You may need vaccination or additional tips on how to protect yourself from insects.

NOTE:

- If the ship's medical staff determines you are unsafe or contagious, you may be quarantined or asked to disembark at the next port. Make sure your travel insurance includes "trip interruption insurance" for your financial protection.
- Medical care on board a ship can be very expensive so plan to carry your own symptomatic treatments and buy travel insurance.

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