

HEALTH

AVAILABILITY & COST OF HEALTH CARE

- ✚ Health risks and the quality of medical facilities vary depending on where and how you travel in Thailand. The majority of cities and popular tourist areas have adequate, and even excellent, medical care. However, travel to remote rural areas can expose you to some health risks and less adequate medical care.
- ✚ Bangkok is considered a centre of medical excellence in Southeast Asia. Private hospitals are more expensive than other medical facilities, but offer a superior standard of care and English-speaking staff. The cost of health care is relatively cheap in Thailand compared to most Western countries.

BEFORE YOU GO

All travelers should consult their doctor with regards to vaccinations and up-to-date health advice at least 4-8 weeks before departure.

- ✚ Pack any medications in clearly labelled containers.
- ✚ Bring a letter from your doctor describing your medical conditions and medications.
- ✚ If carrying syringes or needles, have a physician's letter documenting their medical necessity.
- ✚ If you have a heart condition, bring a copy of a recent ECG.
- ✚ Bring extra supplies of any regular medication (in case of loss or theft).

RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends the following vaccinations for travellers to Southeast Asia:

- ✚ **Adult diphtheria** and tetanus Single booster recommended if you've had none in the previous 10 years.
- ✚ **Hepatitis A:** All travellers to Southeast Asia should be vaccinated against hepatitis A. Travelers can get hepatitis A through contaminated food or water in Southeast Asia, regardless of where they are eating or staying. Vaccine is recommended for all travelers over one year of age. It should be given at least two weeks (preferably four weeks or more) before departure. A booster should be given 6-12 months later to confer long-term immunity.
- ✚ **Hepatitis B:** Travellers can get hepatitis B through sexual contact, contaminated needles, and blood products, so this vaccine is recommended if you might have sex with a new partner, get a tattoo or piercing, or have any medical procedures.
- ✚ **Measles, mumps and rubella(MMR):** Measles, mumps, and rubella are serious diseases and vaccines against them are required unless you have had the diseases. Many young adults require a booster.
- ✚ **Typhoid:** Travelers can get typhoid through contaminated food or water in Southeast Asia. this vaccine is recommended for most travelers, especially if you are staying with friends or relatives, visiting smaller cities or rural areas, or if you are an adventurous eater.

- ✚ **Varicella** If you haven't had chickenpox, discuss this vaccination with your doctor.

Other health risks in Thailand include

- ✚ **Travelers' diarrhea:** is the most common travel-related ailment. The cornerstone of prevention is food and water precautions, as outlined below. All travelers should bring along an antibiotic and an antidiarrheal drug to be started promptly if significant diarrhea occurs, defined as three or more loose stools in an 8-hour period or five or more loose stools in a 24-hour period, especially if associated with nausea, vomiting, cramps, fever or blood in the stool.
- ✚ **Polio:** You may need a polio vaccine before your trip to Thailand.
 - If you were vaccinated against polio as a child but have never had a polio booster dose as an adult, you should get this booster dose. Adults need only one polio booster in their lives.
 - All children should be up-to-date in their polio immunizations and any adult who never completed the initial series of immunizations should do so before departure.
- ✚ **Malaria** in Thailand: prophylaxis is recommended for rural, forested areas that border Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, and Laos. Rare local cases have been reported from Phang Nga and Phuket; malaria pills are not generally recommended for these two areas, but insect protection measures are advised, as below. There is no malaria risk in major tourist resorts or in the cities of Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Pattaya, Ko Samui, and Ko Phangan.
- ✚ **Japanese Encephalitis:** vaccine is recommended for those who expect to spend a month or more in rural areas and for short-term travelers who may spend substantial time outdoors or engage in extensive outdoor activities in rural or agricultural areas, especially in the evening. Japanese encephalitis is transmitted by mosquitoes and occurs from May through October in Thailand. The disease is highly prevalent in the north and occurs sporadically in the south.
- ✚ **Rabies:** vaccine is recommended for travelers spending a lot of time outdoors, for travelers at high risk for animal bites, such as veterinarians and animal handlers, for long-term travelers and expatriates, and for travelers involved in any activities that might bring them into direct contact with bats. Children are considered at higher risk because they tend to play with animals, may receive more severe bites, or may not report bites. In Thailand, the chief risk is from dog bites, though cases from cat bites are also reported. Any animal bite or scratch should be thoroughly cleaned with large amounts of soap and water and local health authorities should be contacted immediately for possible post-exposure treatment, whether or not the person has been immunized against rabies.
- ✚ **Yellow fever:** vaccine is required for all travelers greater than one year of age arriving from a [yellow-fever-infected country](#) in Africa or the Americas and for travelers who have been in transit more than 12 hours in an airport located in a country with risk of yellow fever transmission, but is not recommended or required otherwise. Yellow fever vaccine must be administered at an approved yellow fever vaccination center, which will give each vaccinee a fully validated International Certificate of Vaccination. Yellow fever vaccine should not in general be given to those who are younger than nine months of age, pregnant,

immunocompromised, or allergic to eggs. It should also not be given to those with a history of thymus disease or thymectomy.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Sunburn

Even on a cloudy day, sunburn can occur rapidly. Use a strong sunscreen (at least factor 30+), making sure to reapply after a swim, and always wear a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses outdoors. If you become sunburnt stay out of the sun until you have recovered, apply cool compresses and take painkillers for the discomfort. One-percent hydrocortisone cream applied twice daily is also helpful.

Food

Eating in restaurants is the biggest risk factor for contracting traveller's diarrhoea. Ways to avoid it include eating only freshly cooked food and avoiding food that has been sitting around in buffets. Peel all fruit and cook vegetables. Eat in busy restaurants with a high turnover of customers.

Snakes

- Though snake bites are rare for travellers, there are more than 85 species of venomous snakes in Thailand. Wear boots and long pants if walking in an area that may have snakes.
- The Thai Red Cross produces antivenom for many of the poisonous snakes in Thailand.

Heat

- For most people it takes at least two weeks to adapt to the hot climate. Prevent swelling of the feet and ankles as well as muscle cramps caused by excessive sweating by avoiding dehydration and excessive activity in the heat of the day.
- Heat stroke requires immediate medical treatment. Symptoms come on suddenly and include weakness, nausea, a hot dry body with a body temperature of more than 41°C, dizziness, confusion, loss of coordination, fits and eventually collapse and loss of consciousness.

Insect Bites & Stings

- Bedbugs live in the cracks of furniture and walls and then migrate to the bed at night to feed on humans. You can treat the itch with an antihistamine.
- Ticks are contracted when walking in rural areas. They are commonly found behind the ears, on the belly and in armpits. If you've been bitten by a tick and a rash develops at the site of the bite or elsewhere, along with fever or muscle aches, see a doctor. Doxycycline prevents tick-borne diseases.
- Leeches are found in humid rainforests. They do not transmit disease, but their bites are often itchy for weeks afterwards and can easily become infected. Apply an iodine-based antiseptic to the bite to help prevent infection.
- Bee and wasp stings mainly cause problems for people who are allergic to them. Anyone with a serious allergy should carry an injection of adrenaline (eg an EpiPen) for emergencies. For others, pain is the main problem – apply ice to the sting and take painkillers.

Jellyfish Stings

- Box jellyfish stings are extremely painful and can even be fatal. There are two main types of box jellyfish – multitentacled and single-tentacled.
- Multitentacled box jellyfish are present in Thai waters – these are the most dangerous and a severe envenomation can kill an adult within two minutes. They are generally found along sandy beaches near river mouths and mangroves during the warmer months.
- There are many types of single-tentacled box jellyfish, some of which can cause severe symptoms known as the Irukandji syndrome. The initial sting can seem minor; however severe symptoms such as back pain, nausea, vomiting, sweating, difficulty breathing and a feeling of impending doom can develop between five and 40 minutes later.
- There are many other jellyfish in Thailand that cause irritating stings but no serious effects. The only way to prevent these stings is to wear protective clothing.
- **First aid for severe stings**
 - For severe, life-threatening envenomations, experts say the first priority is keeping the person alive. Send someone to call for medical help and start immediate CPR if they are unconscious. If the victim is conscious, douse the stung area liberally with vinegar for 30 seconds.
 - Vinegar can also reduce irritation from minor stings. It is best to seek medical care quickly in case any other symptoms develop over the next 40 minutes.
 - Australia and Thailand are now working in close collaboration to identify the species of jellyfish in Thai waters, as well as their ecology – hopefully enabling better prediction and detection of the jellyfish.

Skin Problems

- Prickly heat is a common skin rash in the tropics, caused by sweat being trapped under the skin. Treat by taking cool showers and using powders.
- Two fungal rashes commonly affect travellers. The first occurs in the groin, armpits and between the toes. It starts as a red patch that slowly spreads and is usually itchy. Treatment involves keeping the skin dry, avoiding chafing and using an antifungal cream such as Clotrimazole or Lamisil. The fungus *Tinea versicolor* causes small and light-coloured patches, most commonly on the back, chest and shoulders. Consult a doctor.
- Cuts and scratches become easily infected in humid climates. Immediately wash all wounds in clean water and apply antiseptic. If you develop signs of infection, see a doctor. Coral cuts can easily become infected.

 **Parasites:** Numerous parasites are common in local populations in Thailand, but most of these are rare in travellers. To avoid parasitic infections, wear shoes and avoid eating raw food, especially fish, pork and vegetables.