

Yellow fever & vaccine information



What is yellow fever?

Yellow fever is a serious disease caused by the yellow fever virus. It is found in certain parts of Africa and South America. It is spread through the bite of an infected mosquito and cannot be spread from person to person by direct contact.

Most people with yellow fever disease need hospitalisation. Yellow fever can cause:

- fever and flu-like illness
- jaundice (yellow skin or eyes)
- liver, kidney, lung and other organ failure
- death (20-50% of serious cases are fatal)

How can I prevent yellow fever?

Yellow fever vaccine can prevent yellow fever and is only given at approved vaccination centres. Please discuss your itinerary with your doctor or nurse before you receive your yellow fever vaccination.

After receiving the vaccine you should be given an "International Certificate of Vaccination" (yellow card) certified by the vaccination centre. This certificate becomes valid 10 days after vaccination and is valid for life. You will need this card as proof of vaccination to enter certain countries so we suggest you keep it safe with your passport.

As with any mosquito borne disease precautions are important and include remaining in well screened areas, wearing clothes to cover most of the body and the use of an effective insect repellent such as DEET on skin and clothing.

Reasons for yellow fever vaccination

- Protection of the traveller from yellow fever
- Prevention of the international spread of yellow fever

Some countries make the possession of an International Certificate of Vaccination against Yellow Fever a legal requirement for entry to that country. Note that some countries such as Australia and some South East Asia countries require a yellow fever certificate from all travellers arriving within 6 days of departing a country where there is a risk of yellow fever. For other countries it is a recommendation but not a requirement. These may change without warning so you need to remain up to date with each country's requirements.

Yellow fever vaccine

Yellow fever vaccine STAMARIL® has been used worldwide for many years and is a safe and effective vaccine. However it is a live vaccine so some individuals with health problems should not receive the vaccine and in others it should be used with caution

Who should get yellow fever vaccine?

- Anyone travelling to or living in an area where there is a risk of yellow fever, check with your doctor
- Anyone travelling to a country with an entry requirement for the vaccination

Who should not get yellow fever vaccine?

- Anyone with a severe life threatening reaction to eggs, chicken, gelatin or to a previous yellow fever vaccination
- Infants younger than 6 months of age
- If your immune system is weakened as a result of cancer or other medical conditions, a transplant, or radiation or drug treatment (such as steroids, chemotherapy or other drugs affecting the immune system)
- HIV/AIDS or other disease affecting your immune system
- You have a thymus (NOT THYROID) disorder such as removal of thymus, myasthenia gravis, Di George syndrome or thymoma

In some cases, your doctor will help you decide if you can receive the vaccine:

- Adults 60 years and older as they can be at increased risk of severe reactions from vaccination
- Pregnant, breastfeeding women and infants 6 – 8 months of age should postpone travel to an area where there is a risk of yellow fever. If travel is unavoidable discuss vaccination with your doctor.

If you cannot have the vaccine for medical reasons but require a yellow fever certificate for travel your doctor may give you a waiver letter if he/she considers the risk of yellow fever infection low. When planning to use a waiver letter, you should also obtain specific advice from the consulate of the countries you plan to visit, as a waiver does not guarantee entry to a country.

Risks from yellow fever vaccine

A vaccine like any medication can potentially cause a serious reaction, although the risk of serious harm or death is extremely low.

Mild problems can occur in 1 person out of 4 and usually occur soon after vaccination and symptoms can last up to one week, including:

- Pain, redness or swelling at injection site
- Fever
- Muscle aches

What are the possible severe problems?

- Severe allergic reaction (1 per 55,000 doses)
- Severe nervous system reaction (1 per 125,000)
- Life threatening illness with organ failure (1 per 250,000 doses with a 50% death rate)

These last two reactions have never been reported after a booster dose

If there is a severe reaction:

An allergic reaction can present as hives, facial swelling, breathing difficulties, dizziness or weakness. This would happen in the first few minutes to hours.

Other signs of severe reaction can include very high fever, behavioural changes or flu like symptoms that can occur 1-30 days after vaccination.

If you have any concerns of a severe reaction, seek medical help as soon as possible.

