

Health Information for Visitors to Ghana

Things to note before leaving the U.S.

Before leaving the U.S., there are a number of medically related things you might/should do. These are listed below:

1. Routine Needs:

Medical Care: Complete all routine and required exams before coming to Accra. Try to obtain all required and recommended immunization also. Yellow fever vaccine is required to enter Ghana.

Malaria Prophylaxis Medication: Recommended malaria medications are **Mefloquine** 250mg tablets one tablet weekly (starting one week before traveling), **or Doxycycline** 100mg capsules one capsule daily (starting one day prior to traveling), **or Primaquine** 30 mg base two tablets daily (starting 2 days before traveling), **or Atovaquone/proquanil** (250 mg/100 mg **Malarone**) one tablet daily (starting one day before traveling). Please consult with a medical provider to make the best choice for your individual needs. Some of these are contraindicated during pregnancy and childhood and some are weight and age specific. Primaquine use requires a specific blood test prior to use.

Dental Care: Updated dental care for all family members should be completed before coming to post. Routine cleaning, prophylaxis, and repairs are best managed in the States, though dental care is available in Accra. Most urgent dental problems can be managed here, but little or no orthodontic care and extensive periodontal care cannot be found.

Optical Services: Carry at least one extra pair of prescription glasses or contact lenses for family members who wear them. Bring a legible copy of the lens prescriptions also. Your yellow immunization card has a place for this information. There are optometry services here where you may have glasses made. However, it is best to maintain contact with your U.S. based ophthalmologist or optometrist to replace glasses, especially if you have complicated lens prescriptions.

If you use contact lenses, bring a supply of cleaning and soaking solutions. Also, because of the periodic dust, bring glasses in case your eyes become too irritated to wear contacts.

Animal Care: Be sure to fully immunize your pets against distemper and rabies before coming to Accra.

2. Medications

Bring sufficient amounts of prescription and nonprescription drugs to last several months. Do not rely on local pharmacies. It may be possible to find comparable medications in Accra. If you are on long-term medication, you are responsible for your own supplies and must order and pay for these items yourself. Medications are best supplied from U.S. sources. Use your home pharmacy.

3. Allergy Shots

If anyone in your family is receiving allergy shots and if these are to be continued, bring sufficient quantities of serum for at least several months. Allergy serum is not available locally, so you must arrange for supplies with your allergist.

Health Hazards in Accra

Malaria

Chloroquine-resistant malaria in Ghana is a dangerous, potentially deadly disease.

Recommended prophylaxis are:

Mefloquine (Larium) HCL tablets, 250mg weekly, **or Vibramycin (Doxycycline)** - 100mg daily **or Primaquine Phosph.** Tabs 30mg, 2 daily, **or Malarone** - one tablet daily

Mefloquine should be started a week before arrival, taken weekly while at post and continued for 4 weeks after departure; **or Doxycycline** should be started a day before arrival, taken at the same time daily with food or a milky drink, while at post, and continued for 4 weeks after departure; **or Primaquine** should be started 2 days before arrival, taken at the same time daily while at post, and continued for 4 weeks after departure; **or Malarone** should be started 2 days prior to arrival and continued for 7 days after departure. Non-drug measures to prevent malaria include wearing clothing that covers most of the body, liberally using insect repellents on exposed parts of the body especially during the evening and night and using mosquito netting. Health care should be sought for high or sustained (more than 24 hours) fever, chills, severe headache or other incapacitating symptoms. Anyone developing a febrile illness up to 2 months after departing West Africa ought to have malaria considered as a diagnosis.

Immunizations

The only **required** immunization for this posting is **Yellow Fever**. There are a number of others, however, that are essential for staying healthy in Ghana. Immunization schedules are generally as follows:

- **Tetanus, diphtheria** - every 10 years
- **Polio** - one dose, as an adult
- **Measles** - one dose, as an adult, if born after 1957
- **Hepatitis A Vaccine** (Havrix 1440) booster any time between 6 and 12 months after the primary dose
- **Typhoid** (Typhim Vi) - every 2 years; oral typhoid is every 5 years
- **Meningococcal Vaccine** - every 3 years
- **Hepatitis B Vaccine** - 3 doses
- **Yellow fever** - every 10 years
- **Rabies** - 3 doses
- **TB skin test** (for tuberculosis) - every 1-2 years
- **Hepatitis A vaccine**- 2 doses

Food and water-borne illnesses

Tap water and ice in Ghana is contaminated and not safe for drinking, unless properly distilled or treated. Travelers should drink only bottled water or other bottled beverages, e.g. coke, fanta, etc. If

freshly, thoroughly cooked hot foods are eaten, most food-borne infections can be avoided. Raw fruits should be eaten only when they have unbroken skins and they are peeled. Raw vegetables and salads should be avoided as they are often contaminated with parasite cysts or worms. Avoid foods which may have been un-refrigerated for over an hour, particularly those containing poultry, eggs and dairy products. Many diarrheas are non-infectious and self-limited. A liquid or bland diet, which avoids fats and alcohol, clears most diarrheas in 24-48 hours. The most important factor in treating any diarrhea is to replace lost fluids, using potable water, tea, broth, carbonated drinks or oral rehydration fluids. Pharmacies stock oral rehydration packets at a reasonable price. **Cholera** and other potentially life-threatening food and water-borne illnesses are present. Seek medical advice if you run high fever, have blood or mucus in your stool, or experience any of the cholera-related symptoms listed here <http://www.cdc.gov/cholera/index.html>.

Heat and Sun-related Illnesses

Everyone sweats here, and sweats a lot. That means you are much more susceptible to dehydration, especially the mild chronic type. Chronic dehydration makes you feel weak, tired, and lightheaded and increases your risk of developing kidney stones. You must increase your daily fluid intake to compensate. At least 2 liters of fluids each day are essential.

Recognize that heat exhaustion can present with symptoms of: nausea, abdominal pain, dizziness, headache, confusion, poor coordination, and thirst. Stopping activity, moving into a cool room, elevating the feet and legs, and sipping fluids, will help gradually return the body to a normal temperature. Medical attention should be sought for any of these marked symptoms, or those persisting beyond a few minutes.

HIV/AIDS

AIDS is a huge problem in Ghana and in all of West Africa. Transmission here is the same as anywhere else: sexual contact or shared blood or contaminated medical equipment. The HIV rate is approximately 5% in the local population and estimates range as high as 74% among sex workers in Ghana. Don't risk exposure through new sexual contacts. If you cannot abstain, condoms can provide some protection. Condoms are available at many local pharmacies.

Safety

Emergency facilities as we know them in the U.S. are not available here. Be particularly careful to wear seat belts and to limit driving or travel after dark. **Please do not travel long distance by road after dark unnecessarily. Don't swim in fresh bodies of water - rivers and lakes**, as even short contact with that water often causes schistosomiasis, a dangerous parasitic infection.

Beach Safety Precautions on the West African Coast

There are three general things to remember when swimming along this coast. First, study and assess beach conditions, second, if possible take a floatation device (a foam or wood surfboard) with you when going beyond waist deep and third, if caught in a rip tide or whirl pool, **relax and float** on your back or

using your surfboard. **Do not attempt to swim toward shore!** You are not strong enough to make it. Rest, float and allow the current to carry you out to sea.

Once free of the current you can safely turn and swim to shore.

Emergency

In the case of severe, sustained chest pain, marked difficulty breathing, extensive traumatic injuries or burns, profuse, uncontrolled bleeding, PROCEED IMMEDIATELY TO THE 37 MILITARY HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOM, tel. 777595 or 776111 or 776294/ 776295/ 776296/ 776297/ 776298.

OR Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital - tel. 670551/ 670545(Cardio-Thoracic Unit) Ambulance – Accra has no emergency response system like the 911 system in the United States.

Medical Evacuation

American visitors to Ghana are encouraged to have medical insurance that is in effect overseas, as well as medical evacuation insurance since the U.S. government will not pay for, or coordinate a medical evacuation of an unofficial U.S. citizen (private American citizen) overseas. The best-known medical insurance is the **International SOS Assistance London Tel: 00-44-20-8762-8008 Website: www.internationalsos.com.**

When seeking local medical care in a third-world country like Ghana, you will most likely be expected to pay in cash at the time. Make sure your insurance carrier will honor claims made on overseas medical costs.

Stay healthy and enjoy your stay!