

Yellow fever vaccination

If you are planning to travel to an area where you may be at risk of yellow fever, make sure you are vaccinated before making your trip.

About the yellow fever vaccine

The yellow fever vaccine is given as a single injection.

You should be vaccinated at least 10 days before you travel, as this will allow enough time for your body to develop protection against the yellow fever infection. Your proof of vaccination certificate (see below) will only become valid after this time.

The vaccination provides protection for 95-100% of those who have it. This protection lasts at least 10 years and may even be life-long.

Booster doses of yellow fever vaccine

Booster doses of the yellow fever vaccine used to be recommended every 10 years for everyone planning another visit to an area where the infection is found.

However, experts working for the World Health Organization (WHO) recently suggested that booster doses may not be necessary. Since July 2016, vaccination certificates have been valid for life (they previously expired after 10 years).

For the time being, booster doses are only recommended if you are travelling to an at-risk area, you were last vaccinated more than 10 years ago, and:

- you need a valid certificate of vaccination, or
- you were originally vaccinated when you were pregnant, were less than two years old, or had a weakened immune system (for example, due to an HIV infection or preparation for a bone marrow transplant)

Your local designated yellow fever vaccination centre (see below) should be able to advise you if you're not sure whether you need to have a booster vaccination before travelling.

Where can I be vaccinated against yellow fever?

Yellow fever vaccinations can only be given at designated centres. For a centre to become a designated yellow fever vaccination centre, it must register with the appropriate authority. In the UK, this is either:

- the National Travel Health Network and Centre (NaTHNaC)
- Health Protection Scotland (HPS)

Find your nearest yellow fever vaccination centre.

The vaccination is not usually available for free on the NHS, so you will normally have to pay for it. On average, a single vaccination costs around £60.

Certificate of yellow fever vaccination

Under regulations set out by the WHO, anyone travelling to a country or area where there is a risk of picking up or spreading the virus that causes yellow fever must have an International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis (ICVP).

You can find a list of all the countries that require you to have an ICVP (PDF, 436kb) on the WHO website. You can also search the destination information on the NHS Fit for Travel website to find out whether the places you are visiting require an ICVP. An ICVP is not required for entry into the UK.

If you lose your certificate, you may be able to get another one reissued as long as you have details of the vaccination batch number and the date you had the vaccination.

Exemption from yellow fever vaccination

Some people may be advised not to have the yellow fever vaccine because of the risk of potential side effects or complications.

This includes:

- babies under nine months of age – babies who are six to nine months old may sometimes be vaccinated, but only if the risk of getting yellow fever during travel is unavoidable
- pregnant and breastfeeding women
- people over 60 years of age
- people with weakened immune systems – such as people with HIV and those receiving radiotherapy
- people who are severely allergic to any of the ingredients in the vaccine – including people with allergies to eggs, as the vaccine contains small amounts of egg

If the yellow fever vaccination is not advised, you may be issued with an exemption letter, which may be accepted by immigration authorities.

If you have not been vaccinated, you will need to take particular care to prevent mosquito bites while travelling – for example, by using insect repellent and mosquito nets.

Side effects of the yellow fever vaccine

Up to one in every three people experience mild side effects after having the yellow fever vaccine, such as:

- a headache
- muscle pain
- a mild fever
- soreness at the injection site

Reactions at the injection site usually occur one to five days after being vaccinated. The other side effects may last for up to two weeks.

Rare side effects of the yellow fever vaccine

There are also some very rare, but potentially serious, side effects that can occur, including:

- an allergic reaction to the vaccine; this occurs around once for every 130,000 doses given
- yellow fever vaccine-associated neurological disease (YEL-AND) – a condition affecting the brain and nervous system, causing symptoms such as confusion and problems with movement and co-ordination; this occurs around once for every 250,000 doses given
- yellow fever vaccine-associated viscerotropic disease (YEL-AVD) – a condition affecting your internal organs, which can lead to organ failure in some cases; this occurs around once for every 330,000 doses given.

The risk of YEL-AND and YEL-AVD is higher in young babies and elderly people, which is why vaccination is not always recommended for these groups.