



Introduction

Some organizations require individuals to travel abroad for work. When doing so, it is important that workers are provided with the necessary resources and the information they need to make informed decisions to mitigate their travel health and safety risks. It is the responsibility of the employer to assess the risks associated with the travel destination and to take appropriate precautionary measures to ensure a healthy work period and a safe return of workers back to Canada. The risk to travellers is affected by a number of factors such as the type of work being done, duration of stay, and the type of diseases at the destination.

This document provides guidance on health and safety hazards associated with travelling and suggests general control measures to keep workers from Canada healthy and safe during work-related travel.

Assessing Risk

Employers must identify all hazards to which their workers are exposed and take steps to mitigate the risks. They are also responsible for making workers aware of all applicable risks and how to best protect themselves.

To complete a [risk assessment](#), consider all plausible scenarios that can affect workers' health and safety. Determine the hazards during transit (e.g., plane, train, bus, hotels, etc.) and at the destination (e.g., country, state, town, etc.). Consider how diseases are spread to humans such as:

- The inhalation of respiratory droplets,
- Through contaminated surfaces, food, or water,
- The bite of infected insects or animals, or
- The exchange of bodily fluids.

Assess the risks once the hazards have been identified by following a structured risk assessment process. A risk checklist can help identify risks and suggest control measures.

Factors that Affect Risk

Factors that can affect the risk of illness or injury while travelling include the destination, mode of transportation, frequency of travel, work activities, duration of stay, access to healthcare, and individual risk factors. Information on each of these factors is detailed below.

Destination: The location of travel may have region-specific endemic (regularly occurring) hazards. For example, an individual who travels to Argentina for work is at an elevated risk of contracting yellow fever. Travellers may be at higher risk of acquiring a disease depending on the destination visited, especially if the country has poor infrastructure, a lack of clean water and sanitation, or poor management of insects and animals that transmit disease. Refer to [travel advice and advisories by destination](#) to be informed of health, safety, security, and other risks outside of Canada.

Mode of transportation: Transportation can be by air (usually by plane), sea (boat), or land (cars, buses, trucks, trains, etc.). Concerns with the mode of transportation include an increased risk of exposure to a respiratory infectious disease due to poor ventilation and crowded environments. For example, a long flight on a full plane could potentially increase the risk of becoming ill (long duration and dependence on mechanical ventilation) compared to travelling a short distance in an uncrowded car with the windows open.

Frequency of travel: Frequent travellers may be at greater risk than those who travel for work occasionally. Exposure to hazards increases when there is more frequent travel.

Duration of stay: Exposure to hazards can be affected by how long the worker stays outside of Canada or works in a setting with a particular hazard. For example, the longer a worker is located in an area known to have mosquitos that transmit Zika virus, the more likely they will be exposed and potentially become ill.

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Work activities: The type of activities the worker performs while abroad may increase their risk of coming into contact with certain pathogens (germs that cause disease) and other hazards. For example, a worker who works in an environment where rats are common would be at higher risk of diseases spread by rodents, such as hantavirus.

Access to healthcare: The availability and quality of medical care varies by country. Obtaining healthcare resources in some countries could be difficult, and treatment options could be limited. Generally, more care is found in urban areas than in rural locations.

Individual risk factors: Workers with pre-existing medical conditions may be at greater risk of illness or injury while travelling for work.

Preparing for Travel

The information mentioned in this section of the tip sheet should be included in a comprehensive, documented emergency response plan developed by employers. This plan should be communicated to workers before departure for out-of-country work. Workers should be able to:

- Quickly respond to emergencies that occur outside of Canada
- Source assistance for different scenarios (e.g., be able to quickly call an ambulance for a medical emergency or report an occupational illness to a government authority)

Consider using the Government of Canada's free [Registration of Canadians Abroad](#) service, which can provide information about emergencies in Canada and abroad.

Pre-travel vaccines and medications: [Routine vaccinations](#) (based on the worker's province or territory) should be up-to-date before travelling, regardless of the destination. Additional vaccinations or medications may be necessary depending on age, planned work activities, and local conditions. Consult with a health care professional or visit a travel health clinic prior to travel, preferably at least 6 weeks before. This travel [reference](#) can help determine which vaccinations may be recommended or required for the destination.

Workers who require personal medications (e.g., prescription medications for a known health condition) should carry sufficient supplies to last the duration of stay outside of Canada or be able to reliably source necessary medications in the country of work. Make sure that any prescription medications are legal at the destination by consulting [Travel Advice and Advisories](#) and by contacting the embassy or consulate of the country before leaving Canada. It is also a good practice to keep medications in their original containers and to carry a doctor's note explaining their use.

Travel health insurance: General health insurance provided by the Canadian province or territory may not provide coverage when a worker is out of the province or territory. Worker's compensation coverage may also vary. Before a worker travels to another country for work purposes, refer to the relevant [workers' compensation board](#) to learn about insurance coverage limitations.

Travel health insurance may be necessary to cover health-related expenses. Understand what is included in a travel health insurance policy. Ideally, it should cover expenses related to:

- Medical care received for injuries, illnesses, and pre-existing health conditions
- Return to Canada for healthcare
- Death abroad (e.g., to return the remains of the deceased to Canada, or burial or cremation outside of Canada)

Travel health insurance usually covers short-duration trips but if the worker is expected to stay for longer periods (e.g., several months or over a year), local medical insurance may be necessary.

The worker should carry with them on their trip proof of insurance (travel health insurance, Canadian health card) and contact information should they need to use coverage.

For more information, refer to this [travel insurance](#) resource from the Government of Canada.

Emergency contact information: Before leaving Canada, the worker should be provided with information on how to respond to different emergencies (usually through training about the emergency response plan), including an emergency contact list. This list can be stored on a phone but should also be in printed (or written) form. It should include phone, electronic (usually email), and address information for contacts relevant to the worker. The employer should determine the contacts that may be useful to the worker including:

- The worker's supervisor or other employer representative
- Local doctors and medical facilities
- Health insurance information and assistance
- Occupational health and safety departments and workers' compensation boards in the country of work and the Canadian jurisdiction that applies to the worker
- Nearest [Canadian government office](#) (embassy, consulate)

The employer should also keep a copy of the list provided to the worker and maintain communication. Other information to maintain includes the worker's:

- Phone numbers used while outside and in Canada
- Electronic communication information
- Addresses of residence while outside and in Canada

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- Personal emergency contacts (e.g., next of kin or someone with power of attorney may be required to make decisions if the worker is incapacitated)

Travel health kit: Determine what supplies would be useful for the journey and while working outside of Canada. What is needed may depend on the assessed risks. For example, pack suitable masks if there is risk of getting sick with a respiratory infectious disease. A [travel health kit](#), containing basic first aid items and medication among other items, is good to have in all situations.

How to Stay Healthy and Safe While Working Outside of Canada

While working abroad, workplace control measures must be followed to reduce the risk of experiencing an injury or illness. Identifying hazards, recommending suitable control measures, and communicating with workers are employer responsibilities. The worker is responsible for adhering to control measures to protect their own health and safety and for reporting any concerns to their employer.

Workers are encouraged to follow good health and safety practices during non-working hours as well to help protect themselves at all times. Some hazards exist just as much during working hours as in personal time, such as mosquitoes, animals with disease, or unsafe food and drink.

The sections below provide guidance on reducing various risks when travelling outside of Canada for work, including bug bites, animal diseases, person-to-person infections, mental health and wellness, and more. Adopt the control measures based on the risk to the worker.

Bug Bites

Many diseases are spread by the bites of infected bugs such as mosquitoes, ticks, or fleas. Workers who are exposed to bugs while on the job, or while travelling, are at an increased risk of infection. To protect workers from bug bites, consider the following general control measures:

- Use insect repellent containing DEET or Icaridin (follow manufacturer's recommendations for use)
- Make sure indoor areas, especially sleeping areas, are completely enclosed or well-screened
- Treat clothing and gear with products containing 0.5% permethrin, or wear permethrin-treated clothing
- Wear light-coloured long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and long socks
- Provide training about the risk of bug bites and how to prevent them, symptoms of diseases, and the safe use of insect repellents

Learn more about some of the diseases bugs spread and specific control measures in the table below.

Diseases bugs spread and specific control measures table

Type of Disease	Disease Examples	Specific Control Measures
• Flea-borne	• Plague	• Avoid touching pets and wild animals
	• Flea-borne typhus	
	• Cat scratch disease	• Fix or replace old and torn screens in doors, windows and vents
	• Zika virus	
• Mosquito-borne	• West Nile virus	• Keep a flyswatter to kill insects as needed.
	• Chikungunya virus	• Use mosquito netting in any environment where mosquitoes are common
	• Dengue	
	• Malaria	
	• Yellow fever	• Avoid touching the screen or mosquito netting (mosquitoes can bite any part of the body touching the net)
• Japanese encephalitis		

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Type of Disease	Disease Examples	Specific Control Measures
• Tick-borne	• Lyme disease	• When possible, avoid working at sites with woods, bushes, tall grass, and leaf litter
	• Babesiosis	• Wear a light-coloured hat
	• Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever (RMSF)	• Check skin and clothing for ticks daily. Check hair, underarms, and groin
	• Tularemia	• Immediately remove ticks following proper procedures
	• Q Fever	• Wash and dry work clothes using the “hot” settings to kill any ticks present

See the [Resources](#) section for useful links related to the diseases mentioned above.

Refer to the [insect bite prevention resource](#) from the Public Health Agency of Canada for additional guidance.

Animal Diseases

Workers can become ill from animal bites or from contact with animal fluids or feces. While travelling, it is best to stay away from all animals. Learn what types of animals are present at the travel destination and workplace, and the symptoms of the diseases they spread. Common diseases and precautions are listed below.

Common diseases and precautions related to types of animals table

Animal	Disease Examples	General Control Measures
• Bats	• Rabies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid direct contact with all wild or domestic animals, especially bats, rodents, and dogs in developing countries • Do not handle, feed, or attract wild animals with open garbage cans or litter • Do not touch anything that may be contaminated with animal urine or feces • Stay away from caves, tunnels, or mines where bats live • Avoid places where there is evidence of rodent activity such as droppings or nesting materials • Avoid touching the eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands • Immediately wash all bites and scratches well. Use plenty of soap and running water and seek medical care immediately, even if you don't feel sick or the wound does not look serious • Avoid rural or forested areas and places where live animals are slaughtered and sold, if possible
	• Histoplasmosis	
	• Ebola disease	
	• Marburg virus disease	



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Animal	Disease Examples	General Control Measures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Birds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avian influenza (e.g., H5N1) Salmonellosis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid direct contact with all wild or domestic animals, especially bats, rodents, and dogs in developing countries Do not handle, feed, or attract wild animals with open garbage cans or litter Do not touch anything that may be contaminated with animal urine or feces Stay away from caves, tunnels, or mines where bats live Avoid places where there is evidence of rodent activity such as droppings or nesting materials Avoid touching the eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands Immediately wash all bites and scratches well. Use plenty of soap and running water and seek medical care immediately, even if you don't feel sick or the wound does not look serious Avoid rural or forested areas and places where live animals are slaughtered and sold, if possible
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dogs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brucellosis Leptospirosis Plague Rabies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid direct contact with all wild or domestic animals, especially bats, rodents, and dogs in developing countries Do not handle, feed, or attract wild animals with open garbage cans or litter Do not touch anything that may be contaminated with animal urine or feces Stay away from caves, tunnels, or mines where bats live Avoid places where there is evidence of rodent activity such as droppings or nesting materials Avoid touching the eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands Immediately wash all bites and scratches well. Use plenty of soap and running water and seek medical care immediately, even if you don't feel sick or the wound does not look serious Avoid rural or forested areas and places where live animals are slaughtered and sold, if possible
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Livestock (cows, pigs, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brucellosis Salmonellosis Swine flu (e.g., H1N1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid direct contact with all wild or domestic animals, especially bats, rodents, and dogs in developing countries Do not handle, feed, or attract wild animals with open garbage cans or litter Do not touch anything that may be contaminated with animal urine or feces Stay away from caves, tunnels, or mines where bats live Avoid places where there is evidence of rodent activity such as droppings or nesting materials Avoid touching the eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands Immediately wash all bites and scratches well. Use plenty of soap and running water and seek medical care immediately, even if you don't feel sick or the wound does not look serious Avoid rural or forested areas and places where live animals are slaughtered and sold, if possible

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Animal	Disease Examples	General Control Measures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reptiles and amphibians (snakes, frogs, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salmonellosis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid direct contact with all wild or domestic animals, especially bats, rodents, and dogs in developing countries • Do not handle, feed, or attract wild animals with open garbage cans or litter • Do not touch anything that may be contaminated with animal urine or feces • Stay away from caves, tunnels, or mines where bats live • Avoid places where there is evidence of rodent activity such as droppings or nesting materials • Avoid touching the eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands • Immediately wash all bites and scratches well. Use plenty of soap and running water and seek medical care immediately, even if you don't feel sick or the wound does not look serious • Avoid rural or forested areas and places where live animals are slaughtered and sold, if possible • Avoid direct contact with all wild or domestic animals, especially bats, rodents, and dogs in developing countries • Do not handle, feed, or attract wild animals with open garbage cans or litter • Do not touch anything that may be contaminated with animal urine or feces
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rodents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plague • Leptospirosis • Hantavirus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay away from caves, tunnels, or mines where bats live • Avoid places where there is evidence of rodent activity such as droppings or nesting materials • Avoid touching the eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands • Immediately wash all bites and scratches well. Use plenty of soap and running water and seek medical care immediately, even if you don't feel sick or the wound does not look serious • Avoid rural or forested areas and places where live animals are slaughtered and sold, if possible

See the [Resources](#) section for useful links related to the diseases mentioned above.

Person-to-Person Infections

Diseases transmitted through blood, such as hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and HIV infection, are spread from person to person by direct contact with infected blood or other bodily fluids. Certain diseases can be spread from person to person without direct physical contact, such as respiratory viruses. Respiratory viruses spread between people in several ways, such as when an infected person coughs or sneezes, or through contact with contaminated surfaces. Close contact with people in enclosed spaces (e.g., in buses or planes) may increase the risk of becoming sick, so frequent handwashing and wearing of a high quality and well-fitting mask or respirator may be recommended depending on the situation.

Safe Food and Water

When travelling for work, eating or drinking contaminated food or drinks can cause diseases such as travellers' diarrhea, hepatitis A, or typhoid fever.

By following these general precautions, workers can reduce their risk of illness while travelling:

- Avoid uncooked foods (like shellfish and salads) and food from street vendors. Fruits and vegetables that can be peeled are usually safe to eat
- Avoid unpasteurized dairy products, including ice cream

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- Only drink and use ice made with purified water or commercially bottled water in sealed containers
- Brush your teeth with bottled water
- Wash your hands often, especially before eating or drinking or after using the washroom, with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer (containing at least 60% alcohol) if soap and water are not available
- Do not consume food or drink when near animals
- Avoid eating wild animals
- Consider [oral rehydration solutions](#), which are used to treat dehydration caused by diarrhea, if warranted

For more information refer to [eat and drink safely abroad](#) from the Government of Canada.

Mental Health and Wellness

Work-related travel can lead to mental stress, and it can also exacerbate existing mental illness. Risk factors for experiencing high stress include frequent travel for work, working in a foreign environment, or performing humanitarian and disaster work. However, any worker can experience unpleasant or frightening emotions while travelling, which can be caused by a change in culture, jet lag, or even post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Stress associated with work travel can be reduced when workplace control measures and coping strategies are implemented.

Consider the following strategies to improve mental health and well-being while travelling outside of Canada:

- Recognize the symptoms of changes to emotional well-being, which can include feeling stressed, anxious, angry, or depressed
- Provide cultural adaptability training for workers that may work with people from other cultures
- Eat healthy, regular meals while travelling
- Avoid alcohol, which can disrupt sleep patterns
- Exercise regularly during travel
- Stay in touch with friends and family at home
- Consider setting aside time for doing personally enjoyable activities, like listening to music, going for a walk, or practising a familiar hobby
- Practise relaxation techniques (e.g., yoga and meditation) to allow for slowing down and paying attention to thoughts, feelings, and experiences happening in the environment
- Consider altering sleeping schedules before travelling to reduce symptoms of jet lag
- Where jet lag may occur, avoid scheduling work until 24 to 48 hours after arrival
- Take short naps (15-20 minutes), where possible, if symptoms of jet lag are present

Refer to [mental health and wellness](#) for more general information.

Drugs and Alcohol

The use of drugs and the consumption of alcohol can impair a worker's ability to perform work safely. Substance use while travelling should be considered as part of a comprehensive [workplace impairment policy](#).

Possessing drugs (legal and illegal) and being impaired in a foreign environment presents unique challenges. Workers abroad are subject to the laws of the country where work is being performed. For example, medications containing stimulants are illegal in Japan, or a drug conviction in Singapore or Myanmar could result in a death sentence.

[Travel Advice and Advisories](#) provides destination-specific information on drug-related laws. Refer to the Government of Canada's [drugs, alcohol and travel](#) and [do's and don'ts](#) pages for more advice.

High-Altitude Illnesses

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Workers travelling to an altitude of 2500m above sea level or greater can develop altitude illnesses due to the lack of oxygen present at higher elevations. Altitude illness sometimes occurs at lower elevations, but the risk increases with altitude and with subsequent elevation gain. There are 3 types of altitude illnesses, which include acute mountain sickness (AMS), high-altitude pulmonary edema (HAPE), and high-altitude cerebral edema (HACE). Symptoms can include breathlessness, dizziness, fatigue, headache, interrupted sleep, nausea, vomiting, confusion and loss of consciousness. High-elevation environments can also expose workers to extreme temperatures and increased ultraviolet radiation, which can cause hypothermia and sunburns.

Workplace control measures that can prevent the risk of developing altitude illnesses include:

- Acclimatize by gradually ascending to high elevations. Avoid travelling from low to high elevations (2500m above sea level) in 1 day (the extent of acclimatization may be limited by certain medical conditions, especially lung disease)
- Spend at least 1 night at 2500m before ascending higher and spend an extra night for acclimatization every 600-900m if continuing to ascend
- Once at a high elevation, move sleeping locations by no more than 500m per day
- Drink plenty of water
- Consider a high carbohydrate diet while ascending
- Avoid alcohol and heavy exercise for 48 hours after arriving at a high elevation
- Provide training to workers to understand the symptoms of altitude illnesses and control measures to prevent the risk

Workers with pre-existing medical conditions, such as cardiovascular or pulmonary disease, should seek medical advice before travelling to high altitudes. Workers should also talk to their doctor about medicines that are available to prevent acute mountain sickness and shorten the time it takes to get used to high elevations.

Heat Stress and Sun Safety

Workers who are exposed to extreme heat or spend time in hot environments may be at risk of developing heat-related illnesses, such as heat exhaustion and heat stroke. Work involving strenuous physical activity increases the risk of heat stress. Spending time outdoors can also cause adverse health effects from exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation, like sunburns, skin cancer, and damage to the eyes. These outcomes can happen even when it is cloudy. The risks for sun-related injuries and illnesses are highest during the summer months, in countries near the equator, at high elevations, and during the day.

Employers are required to prevent heat and sun-related illnesses. A prevention program should include the identification of conditions that pose a risk of illness (e.g., travelling to hot destinations), and the development of workplace control measures. Recommendations for safe heat and sun exposures while travelling include:

- Limit time in the sun between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. Perform work indoors, or in areas with shelter and shade (e.g., awnings, canopies). Schedule work in the heat or in the sun during cooler periods of the day
- Ensure acclimatization prior to performing a full workload while travelling. Increase the duration and intensity of work performed in hot environments gradually
- Provide an appropriate work-rest schedule
- Provide workers training and education on potential hazards of working in the heat and sun, and ways to prevent adverse health effects from being exposed to these environments
- Apply a broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of 30 at minimum
- Stay hydrated by drinking cool, non-alcoholic liquids, especially water, in frequent small portions
- On hot days, maintain a healthy diet by eating light foods and avoiding protein, which can increase body heat. Consume salt-containing food and drink to help replenish electrolytes
- Wear light-coloured, long-sleeved clothing and a wide-brimmed hat. Wear sunglasses that provide protection against UVA and UVB rays

For additional information refer to [sun and heat safety tips for travellers](#) and [hot environments fact sheets](#).

Violence and Harassment

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Physical assault, threats, and harassment can occur during work as well as outside of work. The risks can be higher where safety and security concerns exist (refer to [travel advice and advisories by destination](#)). Additionally, not all countries offer the same level of workplace violence and harassment protections as in Canada. Some work-related factors that can increase the risk of violence and harassment include working with members of the public, unstable or aggressive people, alone, and during nighttime.

A policy can form a guide on how workers can protect themselves. It can include what are considered inappropriate or dangerous behaviours and how to respond to incidents of violence and harassment.

Some control measures that can be implemented according to the worker's circumstances include:

- Be aware of the worker's location (e.g., in countries where there is risk of human trafficking or kidnapping, knowing the whereabouts of the worker is especially important)
- Work in teams (avoid lone worker situations), or always be accompanied by a local worker or security officer
- Perform work during daylight hours
- Promote de-escalation of conflicts
- Discourage carrying and flaunting valuables (e.g., jewelry) if there is a risk of robbery
- Hire private security if there is a high risk of violent crime
- Contact local law enforcement if there is serious threat or incident of physical harm
- Provide workers with guidance on how they can protect themselves both on the job and in their personal time
- Encourage and inform workers how to report breaches of the policy (assaults or threats abroad should be reported to the [nearest Canadian government office](#) or the Government of Canada's [Emergency Watch and Response Centre](#)).

Refer to [Violence and Harassment in the Workplace](#) for more information on developing a policy and selecting control measures.

What to do if Injury or Illness Occurs Outside of Canada

While the goal is to avoid illness or injury altogether, sometimes they still occur. A worker who becomes ill or is injured as a result of work should inform their employer and [take appropriate measures for treatment](#). If appropriate treatment is limited or unavailable in the country where work is being performed, the employer and worker should make arrangements for a return to Canada for healthcare. An emergency response plan created by the employer should provide guidance on how to respond to illness.

In Canada, occupational diseases or illnesses are reportable to jurisdictional [occupational health and safety departments](#) and [workers' compensation boards](#). When work is being done outside of Canada, the same reporting requirements may or may not apply. The employer should contact their workers' compensation board prior to work-related travel to inquire about health care coverage, and how to report injuries or illness while abroad.

Returning to Canada

Most post-travel infections become apparent soon after returning from abroad, but incubation periods vary, and some illnesses can present months to years after the initial infection

A worker who feels sick during the return trip should inform the flight attendant or cruise staff, or a border services officer upon arrival. As a precautionary measure, the worker can wear a mask to prevent the spread of the disease. The worker may be referred to a quarantine officer for a health assessment and further direction when they arrive.

A worker who becomes ill or injured upon returning from work-related travel must report their injury or illness to their employer. The appropriate workers' compensation board can also be contacted for advice and make a claim for occupational illness (note that the onset of illness can be delayed due to the disease's incubation period). An employer may also be required to report the occurrence to their occupational health and safety regulator. Refer to your local health and safety legislation to confirm reporting criteria, timelines, and necessary information to be shared.

A worker who seeks medical attention for their illness may choose to share information about their trip to help diagnose and treat the disease such as the countries traveled to for work, activities performed, work environment, and public health hazards (e.g., worked in a setting with a lot of mosquitoes).

Resources

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[National Advisory Committee on Immunization \(NACI\): Statements and publications](#) - Public Health Agency of Canada

[Diseases and conditions](#) - Public Health Agency of Canada

[Physical assault abroad](#) - Government of Canada

[Sexual assault abroad](#) - Government of Canada

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