

## Travelling for Carnival?

Follow our advice for a safe and happy trip



International carnival season starts soon – with various European, Caribbean, central, north and south American countries, including Aruba, Dominica, Brazil, Canada, Guadeloupe, Haiti, Italy, Panama, Puerto Rico, Spain, Trinidad and Tobago and the USA celebrating the beginning of Lent.

Carnival dates can vary - many countries start their celebrations the weekend before Ash Wednesday (1 March 2017 in the UK) but some countries have their carnivals later in the year.

Careful preparation and planning helps travellers enjoy a safe and healthy carnival trip.

### Key Messages

Pregnant women and their male partners are advised to postpone non-essential travel to any areas with current active Zika virus transmission. For further information (and to see recommendations for women planning a pregnancy, their male partners, and travellers with serious medical problems) check the <a href="#">latest advice on the Zika virus outbreak</a> .
Check NaTHNaC's <a href="#">Country Information pages</a> for vaccine and malaria advice.
Follow <a href="#">insect bite avoidance advice</a> day and night.
Get travel health insurance.
Be safe—watch out for accidents, injuries and theft.
Be SunSmart—protect your skin from the sun.
Be responsible for your alcohol intake.
Practise safer sex.
See your GP, nurse, pharmacist or travel clinic or to see if you need malaria protection and to check all recommended vaccines are in date before you go - it is never too late.

### Before travel

#### Do your research!

Check the [Foreign and Commonwealth Office \(FCO\) website](#) for up to date safety advice and travel entry requirements for your specific destination.

#### Vaccines and malaria

An outbreak of yellow fever is evolving in parts of Brazil. Please check the Important News and Outbreaks for updates about the current situation and for any newly affected risk areas and vaccine recommendations.

See your doctor, nurse or pharmacist as soon as possible to discuss travel health advice, including any vaccine and malaria tablets recommendations, as appropriate.

Malaria is a serious, potentially fatal, illness spread by night biting mosquitoes. Antimalarial tablets are recommended for many regions in Central and South America and some parts of the Caribbean. Check [our Country Information pages](#) for malaria advice at your destination.

**Travelling last minute?** – It's still not too late to get advice; some vaccines can be given at short notice and antimalarial tablets can be started just before travel, including on the day you travel.

### Travel health insurance

Many countries have no reciprocal health care agreement with the UK, so you must get comprehensive medical insurance (including cover for medical evacuation costs) before you go. Remember – tell your insurance company about any pre-existing conditions and medicines you are taking.

### Medicines

Take a good supply of any regular medicines, as they may not be readily available. Fake drugs may be an issue, so it is always better to travel with your own supply of medicines. Advice on [transportation of personal medication by travellers](#) is on our website.

### First aid kits

You may want to carry a kit of first aid essentials, including sunscreen, painkillers, antiseptic, insect repellent and anti-diarrhoea tablets. These will be useful wherever you're going. If you are travelling to remote areas, consider taking a kit that includes basic sterile medical equipment such as needles and syringes. Then, if you need urgent treatment, you can ask your nurse or doctor to use this, as sterile equipment may not be available. These kits are usually available from travel clinics and larger chemists.

### During travel

#### Food and water hygiene

Follow [food and water hygiene precautions](#). Diarrhoea is common in travellers and could spoil your trip. Avoid dehydration by drinking plenty of water from a safe source (e.g. bottled) and consider buying diarrhoea self-treatment medicine from a UK chemist before you go. If you have bloody diarrhoea, a fever or cannot keep any fluids down, you need to get urgent medical help.

#### Insect bites

There may be a risk of diseases spread by insects like [chikungunya](#), [dengue](#), [malaria](#), [yellow fever](#) and [Zika](#) at your destination. For some of these diseases, there are no vaccines or drugs to prevent them, so avoiding mosquito bites is the only way to protect yourself. Follow good insect bite avoidance measures day and night; use insect repellents, cover up, and sleep under an intact mosquito net if you are not staying in air-conditioned

accommodation. Remember, to prevent malaria, you may also need antimalarial tablets.

### **Rabies**

Rabies, a fatal illness spread by animals, is reported in many countries that celebrate carnival. You are at risk if you are bitten, scratched, licked on open skin by any animal or if an animal spits in your face. Any animal, including pets and domestic animals, can have rabies, so avoid contact with wild or domestic animals. Following an animal bite, scratch, or lick, wash any wounds thoroughly with soap and water, and seek urgent medical advice.

### **Sun protection**

The sun is likely to be much stronger in many carnival destinations. Try to keep cool, seek shade, drink plenty of water and avoid excessive alcohol. Try to limit exposure; use an SPF 30 or above (UVA/UVB) sunscreen (reapply frequently), and wear sunglasses, a hat and protective clothes. See NaTHNaC's [Sun Protection information](#) for more advice.

### **Medical care**

Many countries worldwide do not provide free healthcare. Private hospitals will not usually treat you unless you have proof that you can pay. Remember to contact your insurance and medical assistance company promptly if you are admitted to a clinic or hospital. Health facilities in remote regions or small islands may be very basic.

### **Sex, body piercing and tattoo risks**

Carnival is a time to have fun but it's really important to protect your health while you are away. In nearly every case, condoms will help protect you against sexually transmitted infections (STIs) – so pack condoms and use one every time you have sex to avoid STIs and HIV, which are common in some parts of South America. Think carefully before getting a tattoo or body piercing while you are away, as unhygienic equipment can pass on HIV, hepatitis B and C. These serious infections can also be picked up through injecting illegal drugs.

### **Safety and security**

Carnival destinations can experience high levels of crime and violence, especially in the bigger cities. Take care; be sensitive to your surroundings and alert to the risk of overcrowding and opportunistic crime. Avoid secluded areas and poorly lit places, try to avoid going out on your own – be vigilant at all times. Try to get immediate police and medical assistance if you are the victim of any kind of attack, including sexual assault. The [FCO can help support you following sexual assault abroad](#).

### **Road safety**

Many carnival destinations have a high road accident rate and road quality can be poor. Avoid driving on unfamiliar and/or rural roads, especially at night and take care as a driver, passenger and pedestrian.

### **Water safety**

Never swim after drinking alcohol or taking drugs, check water depth before jumping or diving into a pool and get local advice about currents and tides before swimming in the sea. You are at a risk of a parasite called bilharzia (schistosomiasis) in many regions in the Caribbean and Latin America, so freshwater swimming or wading in rivers, streams or lakes, is not recommended. Swimming in chlorinated pools and in the sea does not put you at risk of bilharzia.

### Drugs

You are strongly advised not to engage in any illegal drug use. Most Caribbean and Latin American countries have very severe legal penalties for drug possession and/or use. European countries may have less strict laws, but many are likely to be stricter than the UK.

### After travel

If you have any symptoms, such as fever, flu-like illness, or persistent diarrhoea, you should seek immediate medical advice. Make sure your doctor knows which country you have visited for carnival. If you travelled to malarial areas, an urgent malaria test must be arranged. This is important, even if you took antimalarial tablets and have been home for a while. If you had unprotected sex while you were away or think you might have a sexually transmitted infection, HIV or other infection, see your GP or go to a sexual health clinic as soon as possible.

Have a healthy and enjoyable carnival!

### Resources

- [Diseases transmitted by insects and ticks in the Americas](#)
- [FCO - Helping British people overseas: travelling and living abroad](#)
- [Food and water hygiene](#)
- [NHS Choices: Sex activities and risk](#)
- [Personal safety](#)
- [Sun protection](#)
- [Travellers' diarrhoea](#)
- [Zika virus – update and advice for traveller including pregnant women and those planning pregnancy](#)

### REFERENCES

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