

News Release

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Health department now offering travel vaccines

If you are planning to travel outside the United States whether for vacation, business, education or a mission trip, local health officials suggest making sure you are up-to-date with your vaccinations and checking to see if there are specific vaccinations required for your destination.

The Knox County Health Department recently announced it is now offering travel vaccines. The health department has offered routine vaccinations - sometimes referred to as immunizations - for many years. The addition of travel vaccines came about due to increased requests from local residents and lack of availability locally. "Every year we get requests from students and faculty going abroad to study, parishioners going on mission trips and residents traveling beyond the United States for vacation," said Lorraine Bratton, director of nursing for the health department. "In the past we had to send them outside of the county. Now we can help them closer to home."

Routine vaccines are the standard child and adult immunizations recommended for the general U.S. population, most of them are required to attend public school. Recommended vaccines are travel vaccinations that can protect you in areas where there is an intermediate or high risk for contracting certain illnesses. They also help prevent the spread of diseases from one country to another. Required vaccines are those mandated by government and health officials for travel to certain countries or specific areas. You can visit the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website (cdc.gov) to learn exactly which travel vaccinations are recommended and/or required for each country. You can also call the health department and Bratton or one of her staff can help navigate the requirements.

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“Getting vaccinated will help keep you safe and healthy while you’re traveling. It will also help make sure that you don’t bring any serious diseases home to your family, friends, and community”, said Bratton. The local measles outbreak from 2014 was the result of an unvaccinated traveler on a mission trip returning from a country where there was an outbreak.

“Whenever you are in a foreign country, you’re putting yourself at risk for the diseases and infections that reside there,” said Bratton. “It doesn’t matter whether you’re staying at an expensive resort or a backpacker hostel.”

Among the vaccines offered to local travelers are those for hepatitis A, hepatitis B, tetanus, typhoid, malaria, polio, meningitis, Japanese encephalitis and rabies. One vaccine that won’t be available locally anytime soon is the one for yellow fever which is in short supply due to an outbreak in South America. However, Bratton said she has information on other clinics in Ohio where the vaccine is available

It’s important to get vaccinated at least four to six weeks before you travel. This will give the vaccines time to start working, so you’re protected while you’re traveling. It will also ensure there’s enough time for you to get vaccines that require more than one dose.

Many insurances do not cover the cost of the vaccines because they are considered a “luxury” according to Bratton. She advises checking with your insurance to see what is covered.

Bratton also recommends traveling with a copy of your immunization record. You should keep the list with your passport, and update it with any new shots you get, because immigration officials in some countries will want to see it.

It’s also a good idea to talk with your doctor regarding current medications. Some medications may reduce the effectiveness of travel vaccinations and some vaccinations can interfere with certain prescriptions, such as birth control pills

“The important thing is to educate yourself as much as possible and follow any precautions carefully,” said Bratton. “The educated traveler will be a healthy and happy traveler and will travel again.”

For more information or to make an appointment to get a travel vaccine at the Knox County Health Department, call 740-392-2200, ext. 2235 or ext. 2249.

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