



## Returnees and Evacuees from Haiti: Important Health Information

On January 12, 2010, Haiti experienced an earthquake measuring 7.0 on the Richter scale with the epi-center 17 km from the capitol Port-Au-Prince. As a result of the devastation caused by the earthquake, many Haitian citizens, refugees, and visitors are being evacuated from the country. This sheet is a reference for certain diseases to be aware of and signs and symptoms to look for in the months following the departure from Haiti for both evacuees and returning relief workers. For additional information please contact the Division of Disease Control at 215-685-6740 or visit [www.phila.gov/health](http://www.phila.gov/health).

### **What signs and symptoms should I look for after returning from Haiti?**

The most frequent illnesses include stomach illness (diarrhea, vomiting, stomach pain), skin rashes, respiratory infections (cough, shortness of breath, chest pain) and fever. People experiencing these signs and symptoms should stay home while ill and contact a healthcare provider. Since it is cold and flu season, it is important to recognize an illness that does not get better or worsens, whether it is flu or a more serious disease. Most of the signs and symptoms will develop within several days after returning from Haiti however other illnesses, such as those described below, may take longer.

### **What diseases cause these signs and symptoms? How are these diseases spread, identified, and treated?**

Many diseases may cause similar signs and symptoms. Below are some of the diseases that are common in Haiti. If you develop any of the symptoms described below and suspect that they may be linked to your recent time in Haiti, contact a healthcare provider and discuss your symptoms.

#### **Malaria**

- Symptoms include fever and flu-like illness and can take up to a year to develop.
- Malaria is spread by the bite of infected mosquitoes that are common in Haiti.
- Blood smears help diagnose the disease.
- Anti-malarial medication is available to treat malaria.
- If you started a course of malaria prophylaxis while in Haiti it is important to finish the course after leaving Haiti.

#### **Typhoid Fever**

- Symptoms include fever, headache, tiredness, loss of appetite, constipation or diarrhea and red spots on the torso and can develop anywhere from 1 week to 2 months after exposure.
- Typhoid is caused by bacteria that spread through the fecal-oral route. The disease can be spread easily person to person if a person comes into contact with a person infected or food contaminated with the bacteria. Hand washing is the best way to prevent the spread of Typhoid Fever.
- A positive bacterial culture aids in the diagnosis of the disease.
- Antibiotics may be used to help treat Typhoid fever.
- A vaccine is available to prevent Typhoid fever before one is exposed.

### **Tuberculosis (TB)**

- Symptoms include a bad cough that lasts over 3 weeks and may be full of blood or sputum, weakness, weight loss, pain in the chest, loss of appetite, chills, fever and night sweats.
- TB is spread through the air by respiratory droplets from an actively infected person.
- A blood test or skin test can help detect infection, and a chest x-ray is used to diagnose TB.
- Many different treatment plans are available for those diagnosed with tuberculosis.
- Relief workers are recommended to get a tuberculin skin test prior to departure (within the past 12 months) and 8-10 weeks after returning to the US.

### **Hepatitis A**

- Symptoms include jaundice (yellowing of eyes and skin), fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, clay or pale-colored stools and joint pain.
- Symptoms usually develop within a month from the exposure but it can be up to two months before symptoms develop. People only can develop hepatitis A once in their lifetime.
- Hepatitis A is spread from person to person through the fecal-oral route including through contaminated food or water.
- Diagnosis is done a combination of clinical signs and symptoms and a blood test.
- A vaccine is available to protect against hepatitis A. If you were not vaccinated against hepatitis A you may be eligible to receive the vaccine and/or hepatitis A immune globulin to protect against developing the disease upon your return.

### **Dengue Fever**

- Symptoms include high fever, chills, muscle aches, headache and faint rash on the torso and arms (the rash usually develops after the fever goes away).
- People will usually develop symptoms in 4-7 days after exposure, but it can take up to 2 weeks for symptoms to appear.
- Dengue Fever is spread by the bite of infected mosquitoes which are common in Haiti.
- Diagnosis is done through blood tests.
- There is no specific treatment for dengue fever. Treatment is supportive and may include pain and/or fever reducers, rest and rehydration.

### **What immunizations should be given after leaving Haiti?**

Immunizations will not prevent diseases for any exposures having occurred in Haiti with the exception of hepatitis A. If you are not up to date on vaccinations, particularly your tetanus booster, discuss this with your healthcare provider.

### **What other illness should I be concerned about?**

Anyone who sustained wounds or injuries as a result of the earthquake should seek medical care and make sure that their tetanus immunization is current. Rabies is another concern in Haiti. Anyone bitten by an animal should seek medical care and discuss wound care and rabies treatment with a healthcare provider.

Following a natural disaster, it is common for persons to experience psychological or emotional difficulties coping with their experience in Haiti. There are many resources available to help persons cope with these feelings. Contact the Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health and Mental Retardation Services at 1-888-545-2600.