Travel Positively

Planning and preparing for an international getaway

April 1, 2009 By James Wortman

As *POZ* went to press, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) was still dragging its feet about removing HIV from its list of communicable diseases, which potentially places HIV-specific restrictions on positive foreigners entering the United States. As stateside advocates look to President Obama to hurry legislation along to make it easier for the international AIDS community to visit our shores (so, for example, the United States can host the International AIDS Conference), many positive U.S. citizens are unaware that similar travel restrictions remain in place around the globe, making it all the more important that you do your homework when planning a trip. Ask these four questions before you say bon voyage.

Will I be allowed into the country I want to visit? If there's one thing that can put a damper on a summer getaway, it's not being able to set foot outside the airport. As of last year, 63 countries impose some form of restriction on HIV-positive foreigners. Visit The Global Database on HIV-Related Travel Restrictions (hivtravel.org) to read up on country-specific HIV regulations.

Inoculations: Will I need them? If you're going somewhere tropical, vaccines for regional diseases might be in order. While the HHS affirms that people living with HIV can receive inactivated vaccines for polio, diphtheria, tetanus, typhoid and hepatitis B, it is advised that positive travelers first consult a specialist, as re-immunization may be necessary in some cases. If you're traveling to a country where yellow fever is prominent, such as South America or tropical regions in Africa, talk to your doctor about the proper course of action. If your doctor recommends against the yellow fever vaccine, you'll need paperwork to this effect.

How do I store my meds? You may be tempted to carry your HIV meds in a plastic bag or pill box, but airport security may mistake your antiretrovirals for contraband. Keep them in their original prescription bottles, and bring a copy of your prescriptions in your purse, wallet or carry-on bag just in case you lose them. Remember: It never hurts to over-prepare. Fill your prescriptions before you leave so you don't run out.

Will my health insurance cover me overseas? In case of an emergency, you need to know whether your health insurance provides coverage abroad. For example, the Social Security Medicare Program does not cover medical expenses overseas. Ask your provider about your options, and consider secondary coverage if necessary. Visit the U.S. Department of State's

Bureau of Consular Affairs website (travel.state.gov) for information on obtaining travel insurance; its lists of air ambulance/med-evac companies and other resources can help you find certified medical professionals all over the world. And don’t forget your passport.

Access Denied

These are some of the places that have entry regulations for HIV-positive people. (Source, The Global Database on HIV-Related Travel Restrictions)

- China
- Egypt
- Singapore
- Taiwan
- Tajikistan
- United Arab Emirates

Visit hivtravel.org to check restrictions for a specific country or region.

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