



Health Information for Ho Chi Minh City

Aids

According to the United Nations, HIV/Aids is increasing rapidly in Vietnam. The estimated number of people living with HIV doubled between 2000 and 2006. In the age group of 15-49 roughly 1 in 200 people are infected country wide. Ho Chi Minh City has 10% of Vietnam's population but has 20% of the HIV infected population. HIV testing is available in Vietnam and people should practice safe sex to prevent infection.

Avian Flu

There have been outbreaks of Avian Influenza in Vietnam. This has led to a small amount of human fatalities believed to have arisen through direct contact with infected poultry. The risk of contacting Avian Flu is believed to be low, providing you avoid live poultry at markets, ensure poultry and egg dishes are thoroughly cooked, and follow good hygiene practices following handling raw poultry. All purchased poultry products should be from a controlled stock and stamped by the authorities.

Conjunctivitis

There are many causes of a red eye or conjunctivitis. In Vietnam many cases of red eye are caused by the dusty environment.

Conjunctivitis is caused by inflammation or infection of the membrane that lines the eyelids or coats the surface of the eye (the conjunctiva). It may be caused by virus, bacteria, allergy or irritation. If caused by a virus or bacteria this is highly contagious. If conjunctivitis is suspected consult a doctor, avoid touching the eye and frequently wash your hands, towels and pillowcases.

Dehydration

It is important to drink 2–3 litres of water per day to stay hydrated. The following are the most common symptoms of dehydration:

- Fatigue
- Confusion
- Thirst
- Light-headedness
- Dizziness
- Less frequent urination
- Headache
- Dry mouth

Dengue Fever

Cases of dengue fever doubled in the south of Vietnam in 2006. There have also been a large number of cases in the south in early 2007. Unlike malaria, dengue is more prevalent in urban areas. The virus is transmitted by the *Aedes Aegypti* mosquito. You should take steps to avoid mosquito bites during the day, especially just after dawn and before dusk. There are currently no vaccines for preventing dengue fever.

The period from being bitten by a mosquito and the outbreak of the disease varies between 3 and 15 days. A dengue fever infection can be confirmed by the history of being bitten by mosquitoes, symptoms and by a blood test. The symptoms of dengue fever are:

- Sudden onset of high fever (up to 104°F or 40°C) which cannot be relieved by paracetamol
- Shivering
- Intense frontal headache
- Eye pain and eyes can become red
- Muscle and joint pains
- Skin rash on the body (usually not on the face).

Treatment:

- Do not take Aspirin because it can lead to complications
- Drink plenty of water and cool down by sponging.
- Seek medical attention.

Normally, the acute symptoms settle down within a week, but complete recovery can take much longer. Recovery depends on age and immune status. In rare cases, serious complications can occur (dengue hemorrhagic fever).

Prevention:

Keep yourself safe from mosquito bites (see section about mosquitoes.)

Diarrhea / Food poisoning

Food poisoning is caused by eating contaminated food or water which has not been hygienically prepared or has been incorrectly stored. It can also be due to eating food which contains toxins from for example shellfish. It is best to avoid eating shell fish during the 'Wet' season as dirty water washed down the turbulent rivers to the sea increases the likelihood of shell fish being contaminated.

The symptoms of food poisoning vary from indigestion through to severe diarrhea and toxic shock. The main problem with diarrhea, other than discomfort and inconvenience, is dehydration.

Prevention:

1. Keep a high standard of personal hygiene - careful washing of hands with soap and water after using the toilet, before handling food, and after handling pets.
2. Do not drink tap water – it should be boiled for twenty minutes and filtered, or drink bottled water.
3. Do not overlook sources of 'hidden water' – brush your teeth with bottled water and do not gargle with tap water. Avoid ice when away from home.
4. Any salad vegetables which are eaten raw, or fruit which you don't intend to peel, should be thoroughly washed.
5. Cooked foods are safest to eat. Avoid undercooked meat and fish.

6. Avoid “street food” and ice-cream from unreliable sources.

Management of Diarrhea

- A basic definition of diarrhea is passing three or more loose stools per day.
 - Eat a normal diet and plenty of fluids if you have a mild case of diarrhea.
- If you cannot tolerate food, drink as much fluid as you are losing through passing frequent motions. Drink sweetened tea, or dilute flat soft drinks (dilute to half and half). Use an electrolyte replacement mixture as directed; however, *seek medical advice* before administering electrolyte mixture to *children*. As the diarrhea settles down, resume a bland diet - try rice soup or dry toast or crackers to begin. Avoid dairy products and vegetables.
- Avoid ‘stopper’ medication such as Imodium unless you have to travel. Children under 12 years of age should not be given drugs to stop the diarrhea unless prescribed by a doctor.
 - Medical advice should be sought especially when managing diarrhea in children and the elderly.

Drugs Illegal

There is easy access to the illegal drugs market throughout the country. Be aware that it is against Vietnamese law to consume or to possess illegal drugs and the government will punish offenders by prison, or depending on the amount of drugs found, by death sentence.

Fungal Infections

People living in tropical climate are more prone to fungal infections, because fungi thrive in warm and moist conditions.

Keeping the skin clean and dry, as well as maintaining good hygiene, will help prevent topical mycoses. Since fungal infections are contagious, it is important to wash after touching other people or animals. Sports clothing should also be washed after use. Wearing flip-flops when using a community swimming pool or shower will also prevent topical infections.

Signs of a fungal infection include:

- Itchy, scaly inflamed circular patches
- Lesions with a central clearing and slightly raised border
- De-pigmentation of the skin.

See a medical doctor for treatment if you suspect a fungal infection to prevent it from spreading.

Head lice

There are regular outbreaks of head lice infections at schools. The regular checking at home is the best measure against the spread of the head lice by wet combing once a week

with a fine toothed comb, fine enough to catch the lice and nits. The hair can easily be combed if it is treated with hair conditioner before combing. If there are any living head lice, treat the hair with an insecticide shampoo which can be purchased from your medical clinic or pharmacy.

Symptoms of head lice:

- Itchy scalp
- Presence of six legged, wingless pinhead sized insects.
- Presence of eggs (nits) which are attached to the hair near the scalp.

Heat exhaustion

Heat exhaustion is a mild form of heat-related illness that can develop after exposure to high temperatures and inadequate or unbalanced replacement of fluids. Symptoms include heavy sweating, paleness, muscle cramps, tiredness, weakness, dizziness and headache, nausea, vomiting and fainting.

Cooling measures that may be effective include:

- Drinking sips of cool(non-alcoholic) beverages
- Rest
- Cool shower, bath, or sponge bath
- An air-conditioned environment
- Lightweight clothing

Heat Rash

Heat rash (prickly heat) is most common in babies but may affect adults and children in hot and humid conditions. It is caused by excessive perspiration, which damages the cells on the skins surface, trapping the sweat underneath the skin, where it builds up causing characteristic bumps. As the bumps burst and the sweat is released it causes the characteristic prickly or stinging sensation.

To treat rash take measures to cool the skin. Calamine lotion can be applied to reduce the itchiness.

Hepatitis

There are different types of Hepatitis infections. All types cause an inflammation of the liver and can, as a long term effect, lead to liver cancer. If detected early, medication for the support of the liver can be given.

Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is transmitted via contaminated food and water. The route of infection is faecal-oral. It can be prevented by proper personal hygiene (see chapter diarrhoea). A vaccination is available.

Hepatitis B

There is a high incidence of Hepatitis B in Vietnam. The rate of infectious carriers of the virus in Vietnam is around 12%. It is a disease caused by a virus and is transmitted via bodily fluids, contaminated needles, and non-sterilized equipment for tattooing, acupuncture or body piercing, mother to baby, blood transfusion and unprotected sex.

Most adults recover completely and develop a life-long immunity against the disease. Between 2% and 10% become chronic carriers, which means that they will be infectious to others and are prone to get a chronic liver damage. A Hepatitis B vaccination is available. A course of three vaccinations are given over a period of 3-6 months and the immunity lasts for about five years.

Hepatitis C

The Hepatitis C has the same way of transmission as the Hepatitis B, but there is no vaccination available.

Immunizations / Vaccinations

In addition to the regular childhood immunizations the current approved recommendation is that you are vaccinated against the following diseases:

- Japanese Encephalitis
- Tuberculosis
- Typhoid
- Rabies
- Hepatitis B
- Hepatitis A
- Tetanus

Japanese Encephalitis

This is a serious viral infection of the brain, transmitted by mosquitoes near river areas and pig raising farms. It has a high rate of mortality. A vaccination is available.

Medications currently not available in Vietnam:

- EpiPen (sometimes available at International SOS)
- Ritalin and Concerta

Both medications are available in Asia (Bangkok, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur), but you need a prescribing doctor.

Special brands of medication:

Contact local medical facilities and ask for a medication with the same generic name.

- Family Medical Practice: 3822 7848
- Franco Vietnamese Hospital: 5411 3333
- International SOS: 3829 8520

If it is not available in these clinics, it will most probably not be available in Vietnam.

Mosquitoes

Mosquitoes can carry dengue fever, malaria and can transmit Japanese Encephalitis. Protect yourself against mosquito bites with mosquito netting and repellent. Use repellent containing the active ingredient DEET (products containing DEET are currently available in Vietnam). Colonize standing decorative ponds with mosquito larvae eating fish and chlorinate and outfit pools with a pump and filter.

Parasites: Giardia Lambia

Giardia is a tiny single-celled parasite that infects the gastro-intestinal tract. Some people with Giardia have no symptoms at all whilst others may develop sudden explosive, watery, foul-smelling diarrhea, excessive gas, abdominal pain, bloating, nausea, tiredness and loss of appetite. To confirm the diagnosis your stool specimen must be given to your doctor for laboratory analysis. Metronidazole (flagyl) is the preferred treatment. If left untreated, Giardia symptoms may come and go but can last for months or even years.

Polio

In some areas of Vietnam polio is still present. Please make sure that your vaccinations are up to date.

Rabies

Many animals (dogs, cats, monkeys and bats) in Vietnam carry rabies. It is recommended to get the three pre-exposure vaccinations. If you have not had the pre-exposure vaccines and are bitten you will need to have the human immunoglobulin serum injected directly into the wound. This serum is not always available in Vietnam and the procedure is extremely painful.

Safety

Traffic accidents are major health risks for those living in Vietnam. Helmets should be worn on motorbikes and bicycles at all times to prevent serious head and neck injuries. Non-helmeted people are three times more likely to sustain head injuries in a crash compared to those wearing helmets. A lightweight helmet suitable for tropical climates has been developed in Vietnam. The helmet should be the correct size and fit securely. Recently the Vietnamese government has implemented a law that requires that helmets have to be worn on all highways and in some suburbs.

Smoking

The School is a non-smoking campus. The Vietnamese government is currently reviewing its laws on smoking in public places and may ban smoking in all public areas and offices. There are no rules governing the sales of cigarettes to children.

Snake bites

If you are living in cities, snakebites are not very common. Antivenom is available in Ho Chi Minh City and snakebites can be treated appropriately. **The FV Hospital and Cho Ray Hospital have antivenins.**

First Aid for snake bites:

1. Stay calm and lie down.

2. Do not wash the area of the bite and do not suck the venom out. It is important to retain traces of the venom for the use of a venom identification kit.
3. Stop the lymphatic spread of the venom by:
 - A firm bandage (starting above the wound and as firm as for a sprained ankle.) Do not interrupt the blood flow completely.
 - Immobilize with a splint or a sling.
4. Seek medical attention.
5. Leave the removal of the bandage to the doctors.

If you find a snake on your premises, call Wildlife at Risk (WAR) to remove it safely.

Phone: 0904 443 978

Spider bites

Most spiders are harmless to humans. Almost all bites humans receive from spiders are defensive. Depending on the size of the spider it can inflict wounds from their fangs. As they feed on dead insects or little animals, germs can be transmitted and the wound can get infected.

If a spider bite is suspected:

- Clean the wound with water and soap and disinfect with Betadine
- Apply an ice pack
- If swelling and redness occurs see a doctor for further treatment.

No major venomous spiders have been reported in Vietnam.

Stings of sea creatures

There are different sea creatures which can sting like jelly fish, stonefish and sea urchins. With some kinds vinegar helps, with others hot water. Ask the staff of the resort where you are staying to provide advice in case you are stung by a sea creature.

Sunburn

Even in cloudy weather it is easy to get sun burnt. Make sure you are always protected with sunscreen, hat and UV filtering sun glasses when you are outside.

Swimming Pools

Each year about 280 children under 5 years drown in swimming pools in the USA alone, excluding accidents which occur from damaged drains or pumps.

To ensure safety:

- Build barriers around the pool at least 1.22m high.
- Supervise children closely (and never use a floating device instead of supervision.)
- Keep rescue equipment and phone next to the pool.
- Learn CPR.
- The gates should be self closing and self-latching and out of reach for small children.

- Check drains and the pumps regularly for damage.
- Install a safety vacuum release system (it shuts off a pump if a blockage is detected) or
Mark the location of the electrical cut-off switch for the pump.

Tuberculosis (TB)

TB is still prevalent in Vietnam like in many other developing countries. It is recommended to check annually for TB. A test on arrival gives you a basis for further tests.

Water

Don't drink the water from the tap. Make sure that you either drink boiled water or buy sealed drinking water.

Worms

Children are more often infested with intestinal worms than adults. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates up to 90% of school children in Vietnam are infested. A person who is infested with worms may have abdominal pain, anal itching and diarrhea. It is recommended by WHO that everyone living in Vietnam takes a de-worming drug twice per year. A single dose of Albenbazole 400mg or Mebendazole 500mg is widely available and is safe and simple to take.

Wounds

Wound healing can be slower in humid environments such as Vietnam. Following an injury where there is an open wound the most important thing you can do to prevent infection is to keep the wound clean. Wash your hands thoroughly before caring for your wound.

1. Clean the wound twice a day with mild soap and bottled water or with normal saline.
2. If you wish to apply an antibiotic solution or ointment, see the doctor first so that you get the correct medication. However, for minor wounds Betadine antiseptic solution or an antiseptic cream are suitable and widely available in Vietnam. Always **ensure that the treatment does not contain hydrocortisone or cortisone**, because it slows the healing process, which can cause infection and lead to scarring.
3. Cover the wound with a non-stick dressing (Melonin).

Keep the dressing on whilst showering, then afterwards remove the dressing and follow steps 1-4.

You may stop caring for the wound once a scab or new skin has covered the wound. Do not pick the scab off. It will fall off after a few days.

This document is for information only and is not intended to replace professional medical care nor as a basis for diagnosis or treatment. If you have health problems, consult a doctor.

If you have any concerns, please contact the School Clinic during school hours or phone: 3898 9100 #105.