



Swedish Civil
Contingencies
Agency

Staying healthy

on overseas missions with MSB



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Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB)

Contact person: Medical coordinator

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Introduction

This folder intends to give you brief information on health related risks and how to avoid them working in overseas operations. It is complementary to information provided in the induction course and at the pre-deployment briefing. You can use it to remind yourself of how to prevent illness and how to manage some health problems that can occur during mission.

Checklist

- The Yellow Book (International Vaccination Certificate) – keep a copy at home and/or electronically
- Malaria prophylaxis if recommended
- Insurance card from Kammarkollegiet
- Emergency phone numbers
- Cash in US dollar (sometimes Euro is ok)
- MSB's medical kit & personal medications
- Sun cream & head protection
- Hand disinfection
- Insect repellent
- Mosquito net if in a mosquito area
- The MSB field staff handbook

Get prepared

Prior to departure, it is recommended that you search information on health related aspects in the area where you will be working, including climate, infectious diseases, access to safe water and food and medical resources in the area. As a first priority when arriving to your duty station you should always get prepared for what to do in case of emergency medical situations.

En Route

Jet lag

Jet lag occurs when you are on a long haul flight and have to pass through different time zones. Generally it takes one day per every hour of time difference to recover. While on flight, avoid alcohol, set the watch to the destination time and try to eat and sleep according to your synchronized time. Upon arrival, try to stay awake until night time as it might help your body to adjust faster.

DVT

Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) is a blood clot that can develop a deep vein usually in the thigh or calf. The risk is if the flight is more than 6-8h. During the flight, try to move around, do exercise while sitting in the chair – bend and straighten your legs/feet/toes and arms. Drink a lot of water and avoid alcohol as it dehydrates you. Avoid sleeping pills and try to make sure you are as comfortable as possible.

Acclimatization

The need for acclimatization should not be underestimated. Our bodies need to adapt to new climates, food, and culture and as described below altitude. This process takes time and, in general terms, it can take up to a week before you function to your optimum; hence, take it easy the first days.

Altitude

High-altitude illness (HAI) results when hypoxic stress outstrips acclimatization. HAI can occur at any altitude above 2100 m but is particularly common above 2750 m. Susceptibility is primarily genetic, but fast rates of ascent and higher sleeping altitudes are important precipitating factors. The spectrum of HAI includes common acute mountain sickness (AMS), occasional high-altitude pulmonary oedema and, rarely, high altitude cerebral oedema. The latter two conditions, although uncommon, are potentially fatal. AMS may occur after 1–12h at high altitude. Headache is followed by anorexia, nausea, insomnia, fatigue and lassitude.

Preventive measures

- Avoid one-day travel to sleeping altitudes over 2750 m, if possible. Break the journey for at least one night at 2000–2500 m.
- Avoid overexertion and alcohol for the first 24h at altitude; drink extra water.
- If direct travel to sleeping altitude over 2750 m is unavoidable, consult your medic or medical coordinator for advice.

TRAVELERS WITH THE FOLLOWING SYMPTOMS SHOULD SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION WHEN EXPERIENCING, AT ALTITUDE:

- Symptoms of AMS that are severe or last longer than 2 days;
- Progressive shortness of breath with cough and fatigue; ataxia or altered mental status.

Environmental Health

Hygiene

- Wash your hands before handling food and often during food preparation.
- Wash your hands after going to the toilet!
- Rinse fruits and vegetables in clean water.
- Wash and sanitize all surfaces and equipment used for food preparation.
- Protect kitchen areas and food from insects, pests and other animals.
- Separate raw meat, poultry and seafood from other foods during storage and handling.
- Use separate equipment and utensils such as knives and cutting boards for handling raw foods.

Preventive measures: Beverages and food

EAT ONLY

- Pasteurized dairy products.
- Fruit and vegetables that you have washed in clean water or have peeled yourself.
- Hard-cooked eggs.
- Food that is cooked and served hot.

DRINK ONLY

- Water that has been disinfected.
- Ice made with bottled or disinfected water.
- Carbonated drinks.
- Hot coffee or tea.
- Pasteurized milk.

Travellers' Diarrhoea (TD)

Food and water is the most common source of gastro intestinal diseases (diarrhea). About 50% of travelers to tropical countries get diarrhea. Make sure that you only drink safe water. Tap water might be purified in different ways, such as boiling, UV light, ceramic filtration or chemical disinfection. For chemical disinfection iodine, chlorine dioxide, or chlorine are common agents.

In most settings purified water is also available at the local market. Make sure to find a brand that has been quality assured. Food should preferably be peeled, thoroughly washed in purified water or freshly cooked. Most bacteria die if they are heated (>70°C/158°F). Food should be stored at cold temperatures. Deep frozen food is however not necessarily safe, as it does not kill bacteria's in already contaminated food, which is why you should avoid ice cream and ice.

Bug bites

Mosquitos, ticks and flies can spread a number of diseases as for example Malaria; many of these cannot be prevented with vaccines or medicine. Please note that, several types of mosquitos bite both during night and day, and often live around buildings in urban areas. Mosquitos are not usually seen at altitudes above 1500 m. Sand flies are discrete small insects with poor ability to fly, but can nevertheless be a nuisance. Bites commonly occur on the lower legs and ankles, and can be very itchy and create wounds that become infected.

Preventive measures

- Cover exposed skin by wearing long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and hats.
- Use an appropriate insect repellent (DR1-Salitudin, issued by MSB), or products containing any of the following: DEET, Picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus, IR3535.
- If possible use permethrin-treated clothing and gear. Do not use permethrin directly on the skin.
- If possible stay and sleep in air-conditioned or screened rooms.
- Use a bed net/mozzie-dome if the area where you sleep is exposed to the outdoors.
- Do not walk barefoot.

Animal contact diseases (acquired through close contact with local animal)

Even though most animals fear and avoid people, they may attack if they feel threatened, especially if they feel that their young or territory is at risk. A simple scratch or a bite from an animal can lead to serious diseases such as rabies.

Preventive measures

- Do not touch or feed any animals that you do not know.
- Do not allow animals to lick open wounds, and do not get animal saliva in your eyes or mouth.
- Avoid rodents and their urine and faeces. Keep clean around buildings, leave no debris near the house, keep grass cut short. Keep garbage in closed containers; garbage attracts pests! A tidy environment will not only keep rodents away, it will also minimize the likelihood of snake encounters, remember; snakes feed on rodents.
- If you wake in a room with a bat, seek medical advice, bat bites may be difficult to see.

Post exposure measures

- Wash the wound with soap and clean water.
- Seek medical advice immediately.
- If you are bitten by a snake; try to calm down, panic will spread the poison more rapidly in your circulation. Immobilize the bitten limb, stay still and call for assistance/advice. DO NOT put on a compression bandage or tourniquet!
- Tell your doctor about your injury when you get back to your home country.

Snakes, spiders and scorpions

Snakes fear and avoid humans, but does bite if they feel threatened. Snakebites are rare, and not always dangerous. Use sturdy rubber or leather boots when walking in unknown terrain. Let somebody with more experience lead the way, and make noise as you walk to give the snake a chance to escape.

Travellers should be aware of the local species of spiders, scorpions and snakes, which can deliver bites/stings that can cause allergic reactions, and envenomation with serious consequences.

Preventive measures (scorpions, spiders and snakes)

- Do not handle or disturb these animals.
- Always shake out shoes, sleeping bags, and clothing before use.
- Never walk barefoot, wear shoes or boots.
- Avoid sleeping on the ground.
- Seal gaps on windows and doors.
- Wear gloves when handling tentage, rocks, crates and lumber or moving material that have been in contact with the ground.
- Scorpions, spiders and solpugids found on your body should be brushed off, not swatted!

Infectious diseases/Sexual transmitted diseases

Diseases, as for example HIV and Hepatitis B/C infection can be spread through body fluids, such as saliva, blood, vomit, and semen. Consult the MSB code of conduct for guidance on sexual activity in the field.

Protect yourself:

- Use latex condoms correctly.
- Do not inject drugs.
- Limit alcohol consumption. People take more risks when intoxicated.
- Do not share needles or any devices that can break the skin. That includes needles for tattoos, piercings, and acupuncture.
- If you receive medical or dental care, make sure the equipment is disinfected or sanitized.

Climate

Heat

Sudden changes in temperature and humidity may have adverse effects on health. Exposure to high temperature results in loss of water and electrolytes (salts) and may lead to heat exhaustion and heat stroke. In hot dry conditions, dehydration is particularly likely to develop unless care is taken to maintain adequate fluid intake. The addition of a little table salt to food can help to prevent heat exhaustion, particularly during the period of adaptation. Travelers should drink enough fluid to be able to maintain usual urine production.

Humidex is used as a measure of perceived heat that results from the combined effect of excessive humidity and high temperature. It is of paramount importance to understand that increased humidity prevent evaporation of our sweat, i.e. inhibit our natural process of cooling the body. At a relative humidity of 90 percent or above sweat evaporation stops entirely which leads to increased body temperature and possibly serious illness.

For more detailed information on the Humidex and heat related issues please visit: https://ccohs.ca/oshanswers/phys_agents/humidex.html

Heat-related illnesses

Heat rash, or prickly heat, occurs when blocked sweat glands become inflamed. This painful rash reduces the body's ability to sweat and to tolerate heat.

Heat cramps are painful spasms of the muscles. The muscles used in doing the work are most susceptible. The spasms are caused by the failure of the body to replace its lost body salts and usually occur after heavy sweating.

Heat exhaustion results when the body loses large amounts of fluid by sweating during work in hot environments. The skin becomes cool and clammy. Symptoms include profuse sweating, weakness, dizziness, nausea, and headaches.

First aid for heat exhaustion:

- Get medical aid. Stay with the person until help arrives.
- Move to a cooler, shaded location.
- Remove as many clothes as possible (including socks and shoes).
- Apply cool, wet cloths or ice to head, face or neck. Spray with cool water.
- Encourage the person to drink water, clear juice, or a sports drink.

Heat stroke is the most serious condition and requires immediate medical attention. The body temperature becomes very high (even exceeding 41°C). Complete or partial loss of consciousness is possible. Sweating is not a good symptom of heat stress as there are two types of heat stroke -- «classical» where there is little or no sweating (usually occurs in children, persons who are chronically ill, and the elderly), and «exertional» where body temperature rises because of strenuous exercise or work and sweating is usually present.

First aid for heat stroke:

- Call 911 immediately. Heat stroke is a medical emergency.
- Stay with the person until help arrives.
- Move to a cooler, shaded location.
- Remove as many clothes as possible (including socks and shoes).
- Wet the person's skin and clothing with cool water.
- Apply cold, wet cloths or ice to head, face, neck, armpits, and groin.
- Do not try to force the person to drink liquids.

Cold

A cold environment challenges the worker in three ways: by air temperature, air movement (wind speed), and humidity (wetness). In order to work safely, these challenges have to be counterbalanced by proper insulation (layered protective clothing), by physical activity and by controlled exposure to cold (work/rest schedule).

Please, note that the wind-chill factor must be taken into account when working in cold weather/windy situations. The risk for frost bite and hypothermia increases exponentially with falling temperature and increasing wind, as for example a temperature of -25°C at a wind speed of 20km/h will be perceived as a temperature of -37°C in light wind. Bright sunshine will to some extent reduce the effect of wind chill, but precautions must still be taken.

For more detailed information, please visit:
https://ccohs.ca/oshanswers/physagents/cold_working.html

Cold-related illnesses

Hypothermia: Body temperature drops from the normal 37°C to 35°C or below.

- Mild symptoms: Alert but shivering.
- Moderate to severe symptoms: Shivering stops, confusion, slurred speech, heart rate & breathing slow, loss of consciousness; death.

Frostbite: Body tissues freeze, e.g., hands and feet. Can occur at temperatures above freezing, due to wind chill. May result in amputation!

- Symptoms: numbness, reddened skin develops gray/white patches, feels firm/hard, and may blister.

Preventive measures

- Know the symptoms; monitor yourself and co-workers.
- Drink warm, sweetened fluids (no alcohol).
- Dress properly: – Layers of loose-fitting, insulating clothes – Insulated jacket, gloves, and a hat (waterproof, if necessary) – Insulated and waterproof boots.

First Aid for cold related illnesses

- Move the casualty to protected area (warm place) change to dry clothes, cover with blankets/and wind breaker.
- Give warm and sweetened drinks if alert, apply heat packs to armpits, neck and groin.
- Do not rub on frostbitten areas, do not walk on frostbitten feet, do not “aggressively” rewarm frostbitten area unless directed to do so by medical personnel.

Personal health

Mental & Psychosocial Health

International travel is often a stressful experience. While abroad you will have to face separation from family and familiar social support systems, and deal with the impact of foreign cultures and languages, as well as bewildering, unfamiliar threats to health and safety. Be aware that high levels of stress may result in physical, social and psychological problems, hence, do not hesitate to ventilate your feeling and emotions with co-workers and support staff. It is better to acknowledge that there is a problem at an early stage than letting it run out of hand, by ignoring or suppressing your problems.

Adjusting and adapting to a new culture is challenging, but necessary, especially when traveling for extended periods of time. It is however important to note that, adaptation does not mean that you agree with all expressions of a foreign culture, as for example oppressive behavior, it can simply mean that you have to make an emotional compromise in order to complete the task at hand.

Maintain an open dialogue within the team; all members are facing similar feelings, and

concerns. If your emotions are getting out of hands do not hesitate to consult your medic or the MSB staff counselor. On well-established missions there is commonly an organized Peer Support system in operation, e.g. trained volunteers that will support you if you need assistance with psychosocial matters or mild crisis reactions. If need arise these individuals will refer you to professional help.

Please note that if you find yourself in a dysfunctional team, where colleagues drinking habits or other behavior are getting out of hand, you should report back to headquarters and ask for assistance!

Alcohol

Regardless of duty station most aid workers will be exposed to temptations of alcohol, and especially in high-stress working environments it is taken to higher levels. Make no mistake! Drinking alcohol is not a sound coping strategy!

Rest and recovery

Make sure you set aside enough time to rest and sleep: if you are well rested you will be able to tackle challenges and handle stress much better. Make sure that the place where you sleep is as quit as possible, use ear plugs,

and/or blinds if it is noisy and light. Keep a light and communications device next to your bed (especially if in hostile environment).

- Sometimes relaxation music can be helpful to create a peace of mind before going to bed, but do stay away from computer screens before going to bed!

Relaxation/meditation

There are many different techniques when it comes to relaxation and meditation, and what works for you may not work for your colleague, simply look for different methods on the internet and ask for advice from your MSB counselor if you need assistance. Below you will find a few simple exercises that can be helpful to you in the field.

Breathing exercise:

- Sit yourself comfortably on a chair in a quiet room, sit straight and close your eyes while doing this so called 4-7-8 exercise.
- Inhale through your nose for a count of four.
- Hold your breath for a count of seven.
- Exhale through your mouth for a count of eight.
- Repeat at least four times.

Creating a Symbol of Relaxation

It can be useful, in terms of practicing relaxation, to choose an image that conveys a sensation of peace, comfort, and/or mental and physical letting go. Choose any image of your liking, a favorite place in nature as for example the seashore, forest or mountain-side, or simply a color or the face of someone you like.

Whenever you feel the need for a relaxation exercise, call up that image as you are becoming more relaxed. Let the symbol grow and fill your awareness, and let the qualities of that symbol come to mind, and imagine them moving through your body to the rhythm of your breath. As you practice, you will be able to close your eyes anywhere, and relax rapidly, simply by calling up your symbol and letting it fill your awareness for a few minutes.

Physical fitness

Situation

As we often find ourselves in environments where it is hard to get outside, or movements are restricted, we need to develop strategies to work out at home. Below you will find a

simple work out that can be done completely without any gym equipment, all you need is a bag or something that holds a weight of a few kilos. Use your imagination when it comes to developing training devices; as for example an inner tube from a car tire can be filled with sand and become a Bulgarian training bag. Why not bring a skipping rope from home?

Make training part of you daily routine

When you are away from home on mission, you often find yourself in a situation where work takes over, and once you have time of you just want to relax. Find a time during the day that works the best for you, as for example going up early in the morning to do a simple work out will prevent you from skipping training once the work day is finished and you are tired.

Make the best you can of your meals

Maybe you end up on a location where you are eating out more than you would normally do, or have little access to good quality ingredients. Sometimes making the extra effort of talking to the locals and ask for their assistance in getting hold of fresh produce can make a huge difference, do however use local food with caution, i.e. follow strict

hygiene routines, wash with clean water and cook properly. If possible and at your preference eat with your colleagues and take turns cooking healthy meals. Try to create a calm and comfortable situation around your meals; light a candle now and then.

Pair up with a colleague

Self-motivation is hard for most of us; hence, teaming up with a partner when it comes to training (and coping with everyday matters) is a very good idea. This strategy will be beneficial for both of you: when your motivation is failing you, your friend will encourage you and vice versa.

Exercise: confined spaces

The simple exercises below will take very little of your time and will most likely be a nice break in your daily routines. Please, do search the internet for variation in your training.

Always start with a warm-up, at a minimum of 3-5 minutes, alternate with jumping jacks, rope jumping, lunges, and push up. If available use the stairs in your building, by simply going up and down rapidly for a few minutes.

Once you are warm, set your watch or other timing device for 15 minutes, and do as many full circuits as you can muster in that time. As your fitness level develops add repetitions or sets as you see fit, and of course you can move on to push-ups on the ground, and add more weight etc. Do not forget to stretch after your training session!

20 BODY WEIGHT SQUATS



15 INCLINE PUSH UPS



10 ONE- ARM LUGGAGE ROWS (EACH ARM)



10 REVERSE CRUNCHES



ALTERNATIVE TYPES OF PUSH-UPS



In case of illness/emergency

Safety equipment

Use whatever safety equipment you have been issued, related to the level of risk at your destination, i.e. if you are working in a high risk environment do not skimp on using body armor, helmet, sturdy boots and safety glasses as per instruction from Security Management!

Medical kit

Know your medical kit! If unfamiliar, ask your medic to explain/demonstrate. Keep in reach/easy access!

Trauma/sexual assault (PEP-kit)

Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) is an emergency medical response kit that can be used to protect individuals exposed to the HIV virus. PEP treatment consists of preventive medications, a day-after pill, laboratory tests and counseling. Personnel that have been exposed to trauma and/or sexual assault and/or blood transfusion are the primary target groups for this package. Ensure that you know who the custodian of this kit on your duty station is. Do not hesitate to ask your medic or the medical coordinator for additional information on this matter.

Medical assistance and MEDEVAC Plan

Find out where to go in case you get sick, know the **Medevac Plan** and bring a medical travel kit including all medicines you need on a daily basis. Pharmacies do often not have adequate stocks, and the quality is likely to vary, of medicine and even routine medicine can be difficult to obtain. The facilities in operation do generally not meet international standards. Facilities often apply outdated and poorly maintained diagnostic and treatment equipment's. Furthermore, medical staff is often not adequately trained in the latest techniques, apart from basic care. Also be aware that a very low English proficiency may complicate medical treatment further. Due to these conditions, a medical air evacuation to another country might be required in the event of serious illness or injury.

Never hesitate to consult your medic or the MSB medical coordinator if anything is unclear regarding health aspects of your mission.

In case of emergency: Always make sure that the MSB Duty Officer and Falck Global Assistance are informed!

Prepare yourself before making the call:

- Who are you and where are you calling from?
- How can you be contacted?
- What has happened?
- What measures have been taken on scene/ or will be taken?
- What type of support do you need?

Contact Details

MSB Medical Coordinator

E-mail: medical.coordinator@msb.se

MSB Switch board

Phone: +46 (0) 771-240 240

Duty Officer 24/7

Phone: +46 (0) 54-150 150

Falck Global Assistance

Phone: +46 (0) 8 587 71717

E-mail: fga@falck.com

Personal Details

Passport Number:

(Keep a copy or a photo)

Blood Group:

Known allergies:

Organization id card number:

Contact person/number, MSB:

**In case of emergency –
Contact person/number:**
