

Health Conditions

Many people have come here with the firm idea that Taiwan is an especially unhealthy place, that disease is rampant, that infection is inevitable. This is definitely not so! True, we are in the tropics; bacteria multiply faster; food spoils quicker; cuts, if unattended, are more apt to lead to infection - conditions typical of any hot area. But with an understanding of the picture and with the use of the simple precautions described below, health hazards are reduced to a stateside level of risk and incidence.

Water

Water used for brushing teeth, etc., and for preparing or washing any uncooked food you may use. For drinking use, we suggest to boil first. Ice cubes should be made also from boiled water. Keep a supply of bottled boiled water cold in your refrigerator. In restaurants or as guests in a Chinese home, one can and will almost always get tea. This is safe, since the water will have been boiled.

Food Hygiene

Food is no problem on Taiwan. Fresh vegetables and fruits are available throughout the year at reasonable prices on the local markets. Fruits and vegetable should be soaked and thoroughly rinsed in a Clorox solution, before being used raw - but better practice is to avoid even this. Remember this slogan: "If you can't peel it, cook it!" Keep in mind that pesticides may have been used to excess and that fruits which fall to the ground may have become surface-contaminated.

Meat, poultry and fish bought locally are fresh and good. They should be thoroughly cooked. Food prepared in restaurants, of course, varies as far as hygienic conditions are concerned. In general, piping hot food is the safest. You should be especially wary in the summer about eating cold or iced foods at sidewalk stands.

Disease

Serious diseases and epidemics are infrequent and public health measures are better enforced than in many Asian cities. Taiwan Tummy Troubles (TTT) can be reduced by the above mentioned procedures, but are still common among newcomers. If diarrhea or vomiting persists more than one day, a trip to the doctor may be in order, since it is easy to become dehydrated.

One should be careful of hepatitis, especially from eating uncooked foods, or seafood during the hot summer. The incidence among Chinese is high, depending on location and season. Some people may be carriers with no overt symptoms. Many Westerners here choose to take the immunization series against hepatitis although it is not required. You may want to consider the immunization series of three injections.

Taipei has a serious smog problem that can initiate or aggravate sinus and respiratory problems. The high humidity can aggravate arthritic conditions.

Medical Services

American medical service is available; charges are comparable to U.S. East Coast prices. Qualified Chinese doctors trained in the U.S. who speak fluent English are available in Taiwan.

Grantees will be covered by the national health insurance, but dependents must wait until they have lived here for six months to be covered. An insurance card from another country is of no immediate use.

It can be confusing to go to an outpatient section of a hospital, but if you are willing to ask questions, help is usually available for confused foreigners who speak no Chinese. Procedures are different at different hospitals. First check in with a receptionist (if you do not have an appointment) and tell them what doctor or department you want to see. Be prepared to show your National Health Insurance card and to pay a small fee (about NT\$ 300, but it will vary according to whether you are going to a small clinic or the outpatient clinic of a major hospital). You'll be given a pay slip and you then proceed to the cashier's desk and pay for your visit. In some hospitals you will be sent to the doctor for this slip and also slips for whatever tests the doctor wishes you to have. In this case, after you have paid, proceed to get the test(s) done. Then it is back to the office for your appointment with the doctor, or makes a new appointment in case the test results take a while. If you are given a prescription, go to the pharmacy, they will give you a slip with the price, pay at the cashier window. Take your paid slip back to the pharmacy window to pick up your prescription.

If your dependent needs to go to the hospital or see a doctor **before** being covered by NHI, the message here is to bring money and save all receipts, in case the dependent has another insurance policy from which the expenses can later be claimed. A minimum of NT\$2,000 is recommended. You may not use it but it is better to have the money in hand. The following hospitals are ones whose clinics have been used by foreign members of the international community. They generally have English-speaking doctors and receptionists.

National Taiwan University Hospital (台大醫院舊館 old building)

No.7, Chung Shan S. Rd., Taipei.

台北市中山南路 7 號

Tel : (02) 2397-0800 (not open in evenings)

Mackay Memorial Hospital (馬偕醫院)

No. 92, Chung Shan N. Rd., Sec. 2, Taipei.

台北市中山北路二段 92 號

Tel : (02) 2543-3535

Veterans General Hospital(榮民總醫院)

No. 201, Shih Pai Rd., Sec. 2 Peitou, Taipei.

台北市北投石牌路二段 201 號

Tel : (02) 2871-2121 ext. 3530 (English information)

Cheng Gung Memorial Hospital(台北長庚紀念醫院)

199 Tunhwa N. Rd., Taipei 105, Taiwan

台北市敦化北路 199 號

Tel: (02) 2713-5211

Cathay General Hospital(國泰綜合醫院)

280, Jen Ai Rd., Sec.4, Taipei 106, Taiwan

台北市仁愛路 4 段 280 號

Tel: (02) 2708-2121

Country Hospital(宏恩綜合醫院)

No. 61, Jen Ai Road, Sec. 4, Taipei.

台北市仁愛路四段 61 號

Tel : (02) 2771-3161 or (02) 2721-6315 (ambulance Hot line)

(English spoken when asked for)

In an emergency, you may wish to go to the following hospital, where there is someone on duty who speaks English, or call the Foreign Affairs Police (see p. 41 for addresses), who have an English-speaking service 24 hours a day and can call an ambulance for you.

Taiwan Adventist Hospital(台安醫院)

424 Bade Rd., Sec. 2, Taipei.

(台北市八德路二段 424 號)

Tel : (02) 2771-8151

The 119 emergency numbers does not have an English speaker on the other end of the line.

Medical/Hygienic Supplies

The following articles can be purchased in Taiwan : dandruff shampoo (various U.S. brands at twice the U.S. price), deodorant (various U.S. brands at twice the U.S. price), thermometers, aspirin(usually sold in only small quantities), bufferin, cosmetics, band aids, calamine lotion, mercurochrome, corn plasters, Vaseline, Unguentine, anti-bacterial salve, Q-tips, Kaopectate, Desinex powder and cream for athlete's foot (termed "Hong Kong Foot" in Taiwan), Desitin cream and powder for diaper rash and adult fungus infections, cold tablets, salt pills, milk of magnesia

and other laxatives, Vitamin C pills, Vitamin B1 pills, paregoric, sulfanilamide or broad spectrum antibiotic for diarrhea, Aralen (Chloroquine) or Daraprim (Pyrimethamine) for malaria suppression if you plan to travel through Southeast Asia and India, and birth control pills or devices. Toilet paper, tissues, soap, sanitary napkins (but only one size of tampons), and Dramamine are readily available, as are solutions for soft contact lenses. Mouth wash (Listerine) is available at a much higher price. Some permeable contact lens cleaning and conditioning solutions are available. One grantee advises that contact lens solutions are expensive, but the IV saline solution can be used instead, and can be purchased at a cost of about NT\$35 per bottle, which would last about one month. A 1997-98 Fulbright grantee advises "For those who have Boston gas permeable (hard) lenses, they do carry that brand of cleaning and solution. No need to bring any. Very reasonable cost, \$200NTD (same or less than in the States) ".