

## MEDICAL INFORMATION

### I. RECOMMENDED IMMUNIZATIONS

There are no required immunizations for travel to Nicaragua, but the Center for Disease Control suggests the following for travelers. The final decision about whether to receive these immunizations should be made by you and your physician.

The following information may not be complete; please consult your doctor for the most recent information.

***Tetanus:*** full series (DPT or Td) with a booster within the past ten years.

***Polio:*** full series for polio prevention. A full series is normally completed by entry into kindergarten or first grade. For previously un- immunized adults, inactivated polio vaccine (IVP) is recommended. If immunization records cannot be found, one booster of oral polio vaccine is sufficient.

***Malaria:*** pills containing chloroquine phosphate, such as Aralen (ask your doctor about long term side effects). Malaria-transmitting mosquitoes tend to bite between dusk and dawn. Precautions include: remaining in screened areas if possible, wearing light- colored clothing that covers most of the body, avoiding the use of scented toiletries, using a repellent containing DEET, and sleeping under mosquito nets.

***Hepatitis A:*** this common disease is passed in a fecal- oral route. Human Immune Serum Globulin 2ml. (Gamma Globulin), administered immediately before travel, protects a traveler for three months. There is also a vaccine for long-term visitors; this series of shots is given over a six-month period.

***Hepatitis B:*** there is now a vaccination for Hep B. Please consult your doctor.

***Yellow Fever:*** the immunization requires one injection and protects for ten years. A Certificate of Vaccination is required if you are arriving in Nicaragua from areas infected with Yellow Fever.

***Typhoid:*** the immunization consists of a series of four capsules of live, attenuated oral vaccine taken on days one, three, five, and seven. The vaccine is most effective when the entire series is completed and the protection should last five years. This oral vaccine is more frequently used than the previous immunization therapy which consists of two intramuscular injections given one month apart.

***Rabies:*** the pre- exposure vaccine series (three doses) is recommended primarily for persons who will be working with animals.

## II. ILLNESS PREVENTION

***Cholera:*** a diarrheal disease that is easily transmitted in areas with poor water supplies and unsanitary conditions. Cholera has spread through several Latin American countries causing numerous deaths, particularly among children, the elderly, and those with weakened immune systems. Cholera is present in the department of León, mostly in its rural areas. The vaccine currently available does not help in controlling cholera because it is not sufficiently effective: it immunizes only 50% of those vaccinated. Vaccination gives a false sense of security to those vaccinated, possibly causing one to neglect the more effective precautionary measures: being aware of how food and drink are prepared, not walking barefoot, and maintaining personal hygiene.

***Dengue Fever:*** a mosquito- transmitted viral disease. There is no vaccine against dengue. The only way to prevent it is by following precautions against mosquitoes. Dengue-transmitting mosquitoes may bite anytime of the day or night.

***Diarrhea:*** follow food and water precautions at all times, especially when traveling to rural areas. Precautions include drinking beverages made from boiled or purified water, canned or bottled beverages, and chlorinating water if unsure of its purity; avoiding ice cubes; selecting well- cooked foods served piping hot; and avoiding salads, dairy products made with unpasteurized milk, and food cooked at roadside stands. Maintaining personal hygiene is also extremely important in preventing diarrhea.

Medication for prevention and relief of mild or moderate diarrhea (Pepto- Bismol, Kaopectate, etc.) should be carried at all times as well as an antibiotic for emergency self- treatment of acute diarrhea. Consulting your physician on this is advised. It is also recommended that you carry toilet paper with you when travelling to rural areas or taking long bus trips.

For mild diarrhea, stick to a light diet and lots of clear liquids to replace lost fluid. There are many herb teas that are thought to aid in the treatment of diarrhea and dysentery: raspberry, comfrey, peppermint, ginger root, and chamomile. You may want to bring some along just in case. Some believe that eating yogurt daily for 1 to 2 weeks before leaving is helpful as well as taking acidophilus capsules (the kind that do not need refrigeration).



### III. PRESCRIPTION MEDICATIONS AND GLASSES

***Prescription Medications:*** Delegates and volunteers should bring sufficient quantities of any prescribed medication they may need while in Nicaragua. Some medications are not available there. For customs purposes, medication must be in the original container with labels intact.

***Glasses:*** The sun is very strong in Nicaragua and sunglasses are recommended.

For contact-lens wearers, it is very dusty in Nicaragua from November to April. This may cause discomfort with your contacts. Please bring prescription glasses with you in case you cannot wear contacts. If you wear prescription glasses, bring an extra pair in case you lose or break them.

### IV. PRECAUTIONS

***Hygiene:*** The most effective health precaution is frequent bathing and hand-washing with soap and water. Delegates should keep scratches and bug bites clean to avoid infection, and wash their hands with soap and the cleanest water available before eating and after using the bathroom. They should also carry hand-wipes and antibacterial hand gel on day trips, and keep their fingernails trimmed and clean.

***Hydration:*** Delegates should ensure that they are urinating at least every four hours. Dehydration can lead to heat stroke and heat exhaustion. Though travelers worry more about diarrhea, failing to drink enough water can also cause constipation. Delegates should carry a full water bottle in their daypack.

***Sun Protection:*** Everyone should apply sunscreen several times a day. Delegates should pack a hat, sunglasses, and enough sunscreen for the trip (sunscreen is expensive in Nicaragua). Delegates should carry these items in their daypack. They should also bring at least one lightweight long-sleeve shirt and one pair of lightweight long pants as well to protect themselves from the sun.

***Mosquito Protection:*** Delegates should carry mosquito spray in their daypack. Long pants and shirtsleeves also provide good protection against bugs.

Open discussion of health problems: The most important lesson for all delegates is to be open about their health with the trip leaders. Delegates should never think that they are being weak or bothersome when admitting that they feel unwell. Though some might be uncomfortable discussing their digestive health, it is especially important for leaders to be informed about any problems so that they can recommend the necessary treatments or medications.

## V. PHYSICAL FITNESS

Your time in Nicaragua will be busy with travel, meetings, and events and will include a lot of walking. PML recommends that you begin your trip well rested and in good health.

If you feel overly fatigued while in Nicaragua, take time to rest, even if it means skipping some of the day's activities.

If at any time during the trip you become ill, *please notify the León coordinator or a trip leader immediately* so you can get the best early care possible.

## VI. HEALTH WHEN YOU RETURN HOME

If you are taking a malaria preventive, be sure to complete the full course once back in the U.S.

See a physician for any feverish illness or gastrointestinal symptoms that are severe or persist for more than 10 days; be sure to inform your physician that you have been in Nicaragua.

If you develop a persistent cough and / or unexplained weight loss, ask for a tuberculin test.