

Travelers and Destination Medical Assessments

This page is designed to walk you through the medical assessment process for travelers and their destination.

Your goal is to field the best team possible by looking at these key areas:

1. Medical Fitness to determine if the traveler can safely perform in a high stress environment, without being a burden to the rest of the team.
2. Maturity Fitness to determine if they have the capacity to make mature decisions and follow direction regardless of personal desires.
3. Physical Fitness to determine if they can actually perform the physical tasks required of them during their mission.
4. The country medical assessment to determine needed immunizations, medical risks, and any preventative medicine procedures that the travelers will have to train on prior to departing.

Medical Assessment for the Travelers

The travelers pass a current physical given by a MD or DO. Any unresolved issues need to be thoroughly address by the traveler, their doctor and with the management and traveler team.

Hint: The organization could have a "Hold Harmless" contract with the travelers to prevent the organization from having to pay for medical and evacuation expenses caused by a traveler's undisclosed illness or injury.

Medical Assessment for the Mission

Each country has its own set of unique medical issues that need to be addressed prior to the travelers departing.

The immunization process is time intensive as doctors will need to order the immunizations for the traveling team members.

Management will have to identify any preventive medicine training and develop a way to train the travelers.

Normal medical training would include First Aid and CPR training with as well as preventative medicine training in areas of clean water processing, basic food sanitation, regional parasites, insects and dangerous wild life.

Does the traveler have any pre-existing medical conditions that will put them at risk or put the mission at risk?

For example: A traveler that suffers from stress induced migraine headaches would not do well on a high stress mission. Sending someone with food allergies and one Eppi-Pen is fine until they have their second allergic reaction and then their life is at risk. Which also means the mission and the organization is now also at risk.

20 pounds overweight is one thing, 40 to 100+ pounds is another thing entirely. So ask yourself how many people will it take to carry an overweight and injured or ill traveler?

Medicines, inhalers, Eppi-pen kits and at least 1 spare pair of eyeglasses need to be taken by travelers that need them.

Most countries have a Zero Drug tolerance for illegal drugs so have a drug dog go through the travelers bags prior to departure. It sounds extreme, but when a traveler can be arrested and jailed in a foreign country for possibly life, it's worth investing the time and money on the front end to find your organization's drug users.

Also keep in mind that drug users are great sources of information, are easily extorted or blackmailed and will jeopardize other travelers just to score drugs so be forewarned!

Before and during the traveler's deployment regional disease outbreaks have to be monitored so the travelers can avoid those areas or if need be evacuated BEFORE there is panic at the airports or the airports are shutdown all together.

Waiting until the last minute to depart only puts the travelers at risk as the airports will either be closed, the flights cancelled or the worst case scenario where no countries will except the inbound flight.

When planning a trip overseas the first thing you need to do is research the country's medical system. Many countries have small specialty hospitals that make up the nation's medical system and ambulance services may just be local taxis. So do your research before someone's life is in jeopardy.

In most foreign hospitals the only way to get medical care is to pay money up front so they estimate the cost of care first. If the team is are unable to pay the estimated cost they won't examine the traveler.

So be forewarned!

The best way to ensure that travelers can meet the physical demands of an overseas trip is to conduct a physical test.

Travelers need to be able to do a "safety dash" of 100 yards, with their day pack on, wearing the clothing and equipment that they would normally be wearing.

Be able to do at least 25 sit ups and 25 pushups. Pull ups are good, but many people just can't do them.

Cardio fitness is very important because of the high stress levels that occur while traveling so travelers workout routines need to include cardio.

More physical tests and higher standards can be added to the examinations, but this level is a good start.

For example self-defense or firearms training are perishable skills, so a training program will need to be developed for all the travelers, the same is with communications equipment.

While deployed the travelers are monitored for new medical problems or aggravation of old medical problems. Upon returning have travelers report any new medical conditions to the management team immediately.

The three main types of insurance needed by travelers are:

Travel Health Insurance as most domestic insurance plans don't cover medical expenses for travelers to other countries.

Medical Evacuation Insurance, make sure you understand the areas of operation and the scope of services for your medical evacuation company.

Kidnap and Ransom Insurance as travelers are very easy targets for the bad guys. Pay for the insurance, if you don't need it then count yourself luck, if you do need it, then let the professionals do their jobs.

Paste the following links to your browser to look at the two leading companies in Medical Evacuation:

<https://www.internationalsos.com>

OR

<https://www.medexassist.com>

Rehearse accident and injury care and evacuation plans with both the travelers and the management team and with upper management. The last thing you want is for some upper manager to jump out of their lane and slow down the evacuation process.

Lessons Learned the Hard Way!

The normal rule is 80% of the group will do what they are supposed to do and 20% won't or can't do what they are supposed to do.

80% of the time the traveler knows they are too sick to travel BEFORE they depart, but they hide it thinking they will feel better after they arrive. So to protect against this you want to survey the travelers and check for medications and spare eye glasses before they get on the plane. If they refuse to participate in the inspection leave them at home.

80% of the time the majority of injuries and illnesses will occur in the first 3 days after departure.

80% of your leadership time will be spent on 20% of your team.

Even the best units in the military can only get to 90/10, so that is why there are contingency plans.

Traveling Team Physical and Maturity Standards:

Travelers must at a bare minimum be able to lift their own luggage, be able to run a 100 yard "safety dash" and be able to walk at least 2 miles.

More advance travelers need to be able to perform well in a variety of exercise and be able to do several 100 yard "safety dashes), in combat, cardio is still king. These events should be done monthly to ensure traveling team members have at least a basic level of physical fitness.

For overseas deployments at a bare minimum the traveling team members should have the maturity of an 18 year old, someone who knows right from wrong and understands and can articulate the consequences of breaking the law, especially in a foreign country.

Bad Apples:

If they are a headache to work with now, then they will be worse and work against you ever step of the way overseas. Don't take Bad Apples! If management forces Bad Apples on you, then have one more talk with management and ask them point blank, is getting the Bad Apple overseas more important than getting the mission done? If you don't agree with their answer then walk out as the Bad Apple is already in charge!

People with Addictions or Addicts:

A surprise drug test about 30 days prior to departure should exclude these people, here again management will normally force the travelers to take people with addictions on the

mission. Management believes if the addicts go overseas and get arrested then management won't have to deal with them, but this can't be further from the truth. Normally addicts will hide their stash in other traveler's luggage, use the names of other travelers to conceal their drug purchases or if arrested by the police they will involve all the other travelers to force the organization to help them get out of jail. Travelers need to remember that they are the ones at risk and not management. **Bottom Line: Don't take addicts or alcoholics!**

Drug dog screening prior to departure:

Yes, drug dogs, because in many foreign countries the penalty for having illegal substances is death, life in prison or a long jail term at least. Save yourself, the traveler's families and your organization the headache and get a drug dog to pre-screen the traveling team's luggage. This will be the last chance for a controlled screening, before law enforcement gets involved.

Recommendations for dealing with doctors:

Most doctors have to order the different immunizations, so it can be several weeks for the doctors to get them, so put that into your planning matrix.

Physicals are very important as they help limit the liability of your organization if something goes wrong. Just traveling is stressful, both physically and mentally and that is not counting the actual mission once you get on the ground. People with severe medical issues are at risk for illness, so why not avoid the problems and headaches for the travelers and the management team by not taking these people.

Count on 10% of the travelers to have illnesses and injuries during the trip!

Sickness caused by bad food, bad water or bad luck are common so get ahead of the curve and plan for it. Injuries normally happen in the first three days on the ground or at the end of the trip.

Psychological issues happen about 1% of the time with travelers; Normally when you have an underlying mental or medical issue and then add the stress of travel to the person, they can have an "episode" where they are not in control of themselves. So sleep management, hydration, no alcohol, eating, and a good buddy system can prevent a lot of stupid stuff from happening. Here again mental maturity plays a key role in mission success.

Highly Recommended that you take a shower every 24 hours:

Options to daily showers are: Water bottle "baths" or at the very least use Wet Ones with Aloe.

The Punishment for not staying clean: All the sweating you do will cause your skin to get a horrific rash called jungle rot which is an extremely itchy form of skin rash. As the salt, from

your sweat builds up, the salt and your clothing will form a sort of sand paper and rub your skin raw. Both conditions are very painful and degrades you as a traveler.

Sleep is the Wicked Step Mother of Mission Failure

Lack of sleep plays a large part in:

1. Bad command decisions.
2. Increased injury and illness rates on missions.
3. Low morale, personality conflicts and failure to follow plans, rules, or protocol, which leads to a lack of productivity and going off mission.

All of these things can lead to Mission Failure!