

# Travel During Pregnancy

## Frequently Asked Questions

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### Overview

#### Is travel safe during pregnancy?

In most cases, pregnant women can travel safely until close to their due dates. But travel may not be recommended if you have pregnancy [complications](#) . If you are planning a trip, talk with your [obstetrician–gynecologist \(ob-gyn\)](#) . And no matter how you choose to travel, think ahead about your comfort and safety.

#### When is the best time to travel during pregnancy?

The best time to travel is mid-pregnancy (14 to 28 weeks). During these weeks, your energy has returned, morning sickness is improved or gone, and you are still able to get around easily. After 28 weeks, it may be harder to move around or sit for a long time.

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### Preparing for a Trip

#### Should I talk with my ob-gyn before a trip?

Yes, talk about your travel plans with your ob-gyn. You can discuss whether it is safe for you to travel. Travel is not recommended if you have certain complications, including

- [preeclampsia](#)
- [prelabor rupture of membranes \(PROM\)](#)

- [preterm](#) labor

## Should I have a check-up before a trip?

Yes, you should have a prenatal check-up before you leave. At this visit, your ob-gyn can confirm your due date. You may also talk about whether you are up-to-date on vaccinations and symptoms to watch for while traveling.

## Why is it important to know my due date before traveling?

If something goes wrong while you are away, your caregivers will need to know how far along you are and any other important information about your pregnancy. If you'll be going far from home, take a copy of your health record with you.

## Why would my ob-gyn check my vaccinations before travel?

Your ob-gyn may want to double-check that your vaccines are up to date, even if you reviewed them at an earlier prenatal visit. Also, you may need more vaccines depending on where you are going.

## What symptoms should I watch for while traveling?

Some symptoms could signal a health problem. Go to a hospital or call emergency medical services right away if you have any of the following:

- Vaginal bleeding
- Pelvic or abdominal pain or contractions
- Rupture of the membranes (your “water breaks”)
- Signs and symptoms of preeclampsia (headache that will not go away, seeing spots or other changes in eyesight, swelling of the face or hands)
- Severe vomiting or diarrhea
- Signs of [deep vein thrombosis \(DVT\)](#) (read [Preventing Deep Vein Thrombosis](#))

## What should I know about deep vein thrombosis and preventing blood clots?

DVT is a condition in which a blood clot forms in the veins, usually in the leg. DVT can lead to a dangerous condition called pulmonary embolism. This is when a blood clot travels to the lungs. Research shows that any type of travel lasting 4 hours or more—whether by car, train, bus, or plane—doubles the risk of DVT. Being pregnant is an extra risk factor for DVT.

If you are planning a long trip, take the following steps to reduce your risk of DVT:

- Drink lots of fluids without caffeine.
- Wear loose-fitting clothing.
- Walk and stretch at regular intervals.

Special stockings that compress the legs, either below the knee or full length, can be worn to help prevent blood clots from forming. Talk with your ob-gyn before you try these stockings. Some people should not wear them (for example, those with [diabetes mellitus](#) and other circulation problems). Also, compression stockings can increase the risk of DVT if they are too tight or worn incorrectly.

## How should I prepare for international travel?

Visit your ob-gyn at least 4 to 6 weeks before a trip outside the United States. At this visit you can go over your travel plans, get advice about specific health issues, and discuss vaccines that are recommended for the area you will be visiting.

This also gives you time to call your health insurance. Ask if you are covered outside the United States. If not, you may be able to buy travel health insurance.

Carry a copy of your health record with you outside the country. Also, before leaving home, locate the nearest hospital or medical clinic in the place you are visiting.

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## Traveling by Car, Plane, or Ship

### What are some ways to make car trips safer?

When taking a car trip, keep in mind the shortest route is often the best. Make each day's drive as brief as possible. Also follow these tips:

- Wear your seat belt at all times. The belt should sit low on your hip bones, below your belly.
- Plan to make frequent stops. Use these stops to move around and stretch your legs.
- Wear comfortable shoes and clothing that is not too tight.
- Wear a few layers of light clothing that can easily be added or removed.
- Eat regular meals to boost your energy.
- Drink extra fluids. Take water with you. You may need to pee more often—don't hold it too long.

Read [Car Safety for Pregnant Women, Babies, and Children](#) for more advice.

## Is air travel safe during pregnancy?

During a healthy pregnancy, occasional air travel is almost always safe. Most airlines allow you to fly domestically until about 36 weeks of pregnancy. Your ob-gyn can provide proof of your due date if you need it.

If you are planning an international flight, the cut-off for traveling may be earlier. Check with your airline.

## When should I not fly?

Avoid flying if you have a medical or pregnancy condition that may be made worse by flying or could require emergency medical care. Keep in mind that most common pregnancy emergencies usually happen in the first and third [trimesters](#).

## Are plane cabins safe for pregnant women?

Yes. Lower air pressure during a flight may slightly reduce the amount of [oxygen](#) in your blood, but your body will adjust. [Radiation](#) exposure increases at higher altitudes, but the level of exposure isn't a concern for pregnant women. If you are a frequent flier, talk with your ob-gyn about how much flying is safe for you.

## How can I make plane travel more comfortable?

- Book an aisle seat if you can. This makes it easier to get up and stretch your legs during a long flight.

- Avoid gas-producing carbonated drinks before or during your flight. Gas expands at high altitude and can cause discomfort. Drink water instead.
- Wear your seat belt at all times. Turbulence can happen without warning during air travel. The belt should sit low on your hip bones, below your belly.
- Move your feet, toes, and legs often. Get up and walk around a few times during your flight.

## What should I know about traveling by ship?

One of the most common health problems for people taking a cruise is seasickness (also called motion sickness). Seasickness can cause nausea, dizziness, weakness, headache, and vomiting.

If you have never taken a cruise, planning your first one while you are pregnant may not be a good idea. But if seasickness is usually not a problem for you, traveling by sea during pregnancy may not upset your stomach.

## How should I plan to stay healthy on a cruise?

- Plan to wash your hands often with soap and water. Pack hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol for those times when you won't be near a sink.
- Before you leave, ask your ob-gyn about which medications are safe for you to take to calm seasickness, if needed.
- Make sure a doctor or nurse is on the ship and that your scheduled stops are places with modern medical facilities in case you need medical attention.

## I've heard about stomach viruses on cruises. What should I know?

You may have heard about noroviruses, which affect the digestive system. Noroviruses are very contagious and can spread quickly on ships.

Symptoms include cramping, diarrhea, and vomiting. You can get infected by eating food, drinking liquids, or touching surfaces that are contaminated with the virus. If you have symptoms of norovirus while on a cruise, seek medical care right away.

## How can I check on the safety of my cruise ship?

Before you book a cruise, you can check whether your ship has passed a health and safety inspection conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The CDC inspects cruise ships to prevent widespread virus outbreaks. You can read these reports on the CDC's Vessel Sanitation Program website ([www.cdc.gov/nceh/vsp](http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/vsp)).

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## Preventing Infections

### Where can I learn about health concerns in other countries?

The CDC has health notices and travel recommendations by country on its Travelers' Health website ([wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel](http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel)).

### What should I know about travel and COVID-19?

You can take steps to protect yourself and others from COVID-19 while you travel. Steps recommended by the CDC include the following:

- Get up to date on [COVID-19 vaccines](#) before you travel. Vaccines help prevent serious illness caused by the virus.
- Consider [wearing a mask](#) in crowded indoor areas, such as in airports and other transportation hubs.

Read all of the CDC recommendations at [wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/diseases/covid19](http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/diseases/covid19). You can also read about COVID-19 and pregnancy at [www.acog.org/COVID-pregnancy](http://www.acog.org/COVID-pregnancy).

### What should I know about food safety while I am traveling?

You can get sick if you eat raw or undercooked food or drink local water in some countries. Serious illnesses, such as [hepatitis A](#) and [listeriosis](#), can also be spread by contaminated food and water. These diseases can cause severe complications during pregnancy.

Safe eating can help you avoid illness:

- Avoid fresh fruits and vegetables unless they have been cooked or you have washed and peeled them yourself.
- Do not eat raw or undercooked meat or fish.
- Do not drink milk or eat foods made with milk that has not been pasteurized.

Tap water may not be safe in many middle- and low-income countries. If you are traveling somewhere the tap water is not safe, follow these tips:

- Boil tap water for 1 minute before drinking it. Carbonated drinks are safe.
- Do not put ice made from unboiled water in your drinks.
- Do not drink out of glasses that may have been washed in unboiled water.
- Brush your teeth with bottled water.

Get more tips from the CDC at [wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/food-water-safety](http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/food-water-safety).

## What should I know about Zika virus?

**Zika** virus was first found in Central, North, and South America, but there have been cases of Zika virus infection throughout the world. The virus can spread

- through a bite by an infected mosquito
- to a **fetus** during pregnancy or birth
- during sex

Zika virus infection generally causes no symptoms. When it does cause symptoms, they may be mild and include fever, rash, joint pain, and red and itchy eyes.

If you are infected with Zika virus during pregnancy, your baby is at risk of serious birth defects, including **microcephaly**. Microcephaly can lead to lifelong problems, such as seizures, feeding problems, hearing loss, vision problems, and learning difficulties.

## How can I prevent Zika virus?

There is no vaccine to prevent Zika virus infection and there is no treatment. You can check if Zika virus is spreading in any country at the CDC's [Zika Travel Information website](#).

If Zika is spreading in a certain country and you cannot avoid that area, you can reduce your chance of infection by

- wearing long-sleeved shirts and pants to help protect against mosquitoes.
- treating clothing and gear with permethrin or buying items that are treated with permethrin.
- using EPA-registered bug spray with DEET, picaridin, IR3535, oil of lemon eucalyptus, or para-menthane-diol. Used as directed, these sprays are safe to use while pregnant or breastfeeding.

Also, use a condom every time you have sex if you have a male partner who lives in or travels to areas where Zika virus is spreading.

## What should I know about malaria?

**Malaria** is another serious disease carried by mosquitoes. Symptoms include fever, chills, headache, and nausea and vomiting. While you are pregnant, you should not travel to areas where there is risk of malaria, including Africa, Asia, and Central and South America. If travel to these areas cannot be avoided, your ob-gyn may prescribe an antimalarial drug that is safe to use during pregnancy.

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## Medical Care While Traveling

### How can I prepare for a health emergency while traveling?

Even if you are in good health before going on a trip, you never know when an emergency will come up. Locate the nearest hospital or medical clinic in the place you are visiting. You may also want to check whether they accept your health insurance.

### How can I find a doctor while traveling in the United States?

You can find ob-gyns who are members of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) at [acog.org/FindanObGyn](https://www.acog.org/FindanObGyn). The American Medical Association (AMA) also has a [DoctorFinder tool](#).

### How can I find a doctor outside the United States?



The [International Association for Medical Assistance to Travelers \(IAMAT\)](#) has a worldwide directory of doctors who provide health care for travelers. You must be a member to view the directory of doctors, but membership is free. Visit [www.iamat.org](http://www.iamat.org).

After you arrive at your destination, you can also register with an American embassy or consulate. This may help if you need to leave the country because of an emergency.

## Glossary

**Complications:** Diseases or conditions that happen as a result of another disease or condition. An example is pneumonia that occurs as a result of the flu. A complication also can occur as a result of a condition, such as pregnancy. An example of a pregnancy complication is preterm labor.

**Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT):** A condition in which a blood clot forms in veins in the leg or other areas of the body.

**Diabetes Mellitus:** A condition in which the levels of sugar in the blood are too high.

**Fetus:** The stage of human development beyond 8 completed weeks after fertilization.

**Hepatitis A:** An infection caused by a virus that can be spread by contaminated food or water.

**Listeriosis:** A type of illness you can get from bacteria found in unpasteurized milk, hot dogs, luncheon meats, and smoked seafood.

**Malaria:** A disease caused by a parasite that is spread through mosquito bites.

**Microcephaly:** A birth defect in which a baby's head and brain are smaller than normal. Babies with microcephaly may have seizures, developmental delays, mental disability, vision and hearing problems, and problems with balance and movement.

**Obstetrician–Gynecologist (Ob-Gyn):** A doctor with special training and education in women's health.

**Oxygen:** An element that we breathe in to sustain life.

**Preeclampsia:** A disorder that can occur during pregnancy or after childbirth in which there is high blood pressure and other signs of organ injury. These signs include an abnormal amount of protein in the urine, a low number of platelets, abnormal kidney or liver function, pain over the upper abdomen, fluid in the lungs, or a severe headache or changes in vision.

**Prelabor Rupture of Membranes (PROM):** Rupture of the amniotic membranes that happens before labor begins. Also called premature rupture of membranes.

**Preterm:** Less than 37 weeks of pregnancy.

**Radiation:** A type of energy that is transmitted in the form of rays, waves, or particles.

**Trimesters:** The 3-month periods of time in pregnancy. They are referred to as first, second, or third.

**Zika:** A disease caused by the Zika virus, which is spread through mosquito bites.

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If you have further questions, contact your ob-gyn.

Don't have an ob-gyn? [Learn how to find a doctor near you.](#)

FAQ055

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