

Laos

Medical Summary

The health risk information presented here is summarized from Shoreland Travax®, a decision-support tool used by health care providers to perform a detailed health risk analysis based on specific locations, individual travel styles, and traveler risk behaviors. Travax provides practitioners current, independently researched malaria risk and prevention recommendations in a map-based format that goes beyond the annual WHO and US CDC statements included here. Not included here are current reports from Travax of disease outbreaks or environmental events that may pose elevated risks to travelers' health and safety. The Providers section of this site offers a directory of health care providers who utilize Shoreland Travax for travel health counseling. Learn more about the detailed reports and maps available from these practitioners (includes links to samples).

General Information

Laos is a developing nation classified as lower middle income. Located in Southeast Asia (north of Thailand and south of Vietnam), the climate is classified as predominantly subtropical dry winter.

Vaccinations

Routine vaccinations are essential due to a persistent global rise of vaccine-preventable diseases (especially markedly high rates of diphtheria, pertussis, and measles). Prior to travel, travelers should be up-to-date with the age-appropriate and risk-based routine vaccinations recommended by their home country, which may include:

- COVID-19
- *H. influenzae* type B (Hib)
- Hepatitis A
- Hepatitis B: Protection is especially important for those at increased risk.
- Herpes zoster
- Human papillomavirus
- Influenza
- Measles, mumps, rubella: A single early dose is recommended for travelers aged 6-11 months.
- Meningococcal
- Pneumococcal
- Polio
- Rotavirus
- Tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis: Tdap preferred; consider an early pertussis booster for high-risk travelers.
- Varicella

Depending on your itinerary, your personal risk factors, and the length of your visit, your health care provider may offer you vaccination against chikungunya, dengue, Japanese encephalitis, rabies, typhoid fever, or a one time polio booster if you haven't previously received one for travel.

Malaria

The following is current information as reported by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC):

WHO—International Travel and Health (current online update, Country List)

(2020) Malaria risk due predominantly to *P. falciparum* exists throughout the year in the entire country except in Vientiane.

- Recommended prevention in risk areas: **C** – Risk of *P. falciparum* malaria. Mosquito-bite prevention plus atovaquone-proguanil or doxycycline or mefloquine chemoprophylaxis (select according to drug-resistance pattern, reported side-effects and contraindications).^{a, b}

^aAlternatively, for travel to rural areas with low risk of malaria infection, mosquito bite prevention can be combined with stand-by emergency treatment (SBET).

^bIn certain areas with multidrug-resistant malaria, mefloquine chemoprophylaxis is no longer recommended. At present, these areas include Cambodia, south-eastern Myanmar and Thailand.

WHO Country List footnote: When available, the date of the most recent update or confirmation is indicated in parentheses in the country list. If no accurate date is indicated, the most recent update or confirmation was provided prior to 2013.

CDC—Health Information for International Travel (current online edition)

Transmission areas

- Present in the southern part of the country in the provinces of Attapeu, Champasak, Khammouane, Salavan, Savannakhet, and Sekong
- Rare cases in the northern part of the country
- None in the cities of Luang Prabang and Vientiane (the capital)

Drug resistance¹

- Chloroquine and mefloquine

Species

- *P. vivax* (55%)
- *P. falciparum* (45%)
- *P. knowlesi*⁶, *P. malariae*, and *P. ovale* (rare)

Recommended chemoprophylaxis

- In the provinces of Attapeu, Champasak, Khammouane, Salavan, Savannakhet, and Sekong: Atovaquone-proguanil, doxycycline, tafenoquine²
- Northern part of the country: No chemoprophylaxis recommended (insect bite precautions and mosquito avoidance only)⁴

¹ Refers to *P. falciparum* malaria, unless otherwise noted.

² Tafenoquine can cause potentially life-threatening hemolysis in people with glucose-6-phosphate-dehydrogenase (G6PD) deficiency. Test for G6PD deficiency with a quantitative laboratory test before prescribing tafenoquine to patients.

⁴ Mosquito avoidance includes applying topical mosquito repellent, sleeping under an insecticide-treated mosquito net, and wearing protective clothing (e.g., long pants and socks, long-sleeve shirt). For additional details on insect bite precautions, see Mosquitoes, Ticks, and Other Arthropods chapter.

⁶ *P. knowlesi* is a malaria species with a simian (macaque) host. Human cases have been reported from most countries in Southwest Asia and are associated with activities in forest or forest-fringe areas. *P. knowlesi* has no known resistance to antimalarials.

Other Concerns

Travelers' Diarrhea

High risk exists throughout the country, with moderate risk in deluxe accommodations. Community sanitation and food safety measures are generally inadequate. Some itineraries (e.g., remote destinations, austere accommodations) and activities (e.g., ecotourism, eating street or local-market food) further increase risk.

Travelers should observe food and beverage precautions, which reduce the likelihood of illness.

Travelers should carry loperamide for self-treatment of diarrhea and, if risk is moderate to high, an antibiotic to add if diarrhea is severe. Consult a knowledgeable health care provider regarding which antibiotic is appropriate for you and most effective for your destination.

Other Food-Borne Illnesses

Precautions to prevent brucellosis may be needed.

Insect- and Arthropod-Borne Diseases

Zika may pose a risk. Personal protective measures are important.

Other Disease and Health Risks

Additional concerns include anthrax disease, avian influenza, helminths, leptospirosis, melioidosis, plague, schistosomiasis, sexually transmitted infections, snakebites, tuberculosis.

Safety and Security

Key Safety Risks

- Road conditions
- Maritime safety
- Petty crime
- Heightened crime risk for women
- Food and beverage spiking
- Theft of vehicles
- Scams
- Natural disasters

Key Security Threats

- Risk of violent civil unrest
- Risk of violent protests
- Potential spillover of armed conflict
- Cross-border threats in areas bordering Burma (Myanmar) and Thailand
- Explosions in public places
- Landmines/unexploded ordnance
- Occasional violent crime
- Random acts of armed violence

Emergency Contacts

The police emergency number is 191. The English-speaking tourist police number in Vientiane is [+856] 021-251-128.

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