

## □ "STAYING HEALTHY IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN" □

**V**irtually every country in this geographic area can be considered part of the developing world. Those of you who have been previously posted to developing countries, however, may well find that health conditions here are quite a bit better than where you were before. On the other hand, those of you being sent on your first posting will undoubtedly find that the conditions have not yet reached the same level as what you have experienced in North America.

There is much written elsewhere about what health precautions to take when being posted to a third world country. Here, I wish to emphasize a few precautions that apply specifically to Latin America and the Caribbean.

A. Before leaving Canada, I would suggest the following:

Have a Hepatitis A antibody test, if you have not already had it. If it is positive, it means you're immune to hepatitis A (the usual type of infectious hepatitis) and so you won't have to argue with the Health and Welfare doctor overseas as to whether gamma globulin shots are necessary or not, you'll have proof that they aren't.

If the test is negative, as it is for most Canadians, it means you are still susceptible to contracting infectious hepatitis. Therefore, for all the posts in this area, with the exception of some in the Commonwealth Caribbean, you should ensure that you have a gamma globulin injection at least every six months. An "old spouses" tale that still exists in the foreign service is that it is uncertain whether gamma globulin is beneficial. The truth is that when there is a high incidence of infectious

hepatitis, and the individual is not immune to it, gamma globulin has very significant protection value, although it may not be 100 per cent.

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One final point on this subject: some have queried whether gamma globulin could transmit AIDS. All evidence up to now indicates that it does not!

Be sure you have a valid yellow fever vaccination no matter which post

you are going to in this area. True, most of these countries do not require a yellow fever certificate for entry and true, there is currently no yellow fever in many of these places; however, the potential for yellow fever exists, and should there be an outbreak you could find yourself in difficulties because yellow fever shots are obtainable only from a limited number of sources. In contrast to most other vaccinations, the Overseas Health and Welfare Medical Office probably would not be able to offer you the vaccination, so that you would have to get it from local health authorities whose supply of vaccine, needles and syringes may not always be 100 per cent reliable.

A yellow fever vaccination, by the way, is valid for ten years so after that you won't have to worry about it again for quite a while.

B. If you are ordering a car to be shipped to the post, or if you buy one once you're there, insist that it be fully fitted with seat belts. Also, if you have a young infant, ensure that you have a suitable infant restraining device for the back seat. Finally, and most importantly, once you're at the post, **USE** the seat belts.

Most countries in this area do not have seat belt laws, and many of the locals prefer not to use them, either because they're not accustomed to them, or because they don't consider them "macho" enough. Statistics do show however, that in almost all countries in this area the incidence of automobile accidents per mile driven is very much higher than in North America and, of course, statistics have convincingly demonstrated the overall value of such belts in diminishing the severity of injuries that occur in such accidents.