

## Health

Medical services in Namibia are of a very high standard. However, the availability of most services is restricted to the main towns.

Emergencies and accidents that occur in remote areas do attract a high cost when transport to the main towns is required. Host establishments should be able to organize these services when requested.

### Vaccinations

There are no mandatory vaccinations for travellers from Europe. If you arrive from a country where yellow fever vaccinations are mandatory you need to produce proof that you have been vaccinated. Take the usual precautions: ask your doctor whether you should renew your vaccinations against polio, diphtheria and tetanus. S/he might also advise to take precautions against Hepatitis A and B. Unfortunately there is no vaccination against malaria.

### Malaria

Malaria remains one of the most feared illnesses world-wide. In southern Africa Malaria is second to HIV/Aids in causing illness and death. In Namibia, however, this applies primarily to the local population in the northern parts of the country, as protection becomes too expensive in the long term. Holidaymakers can protect themselves efficiently. Please note that the following information is not intended to replace an individual consultation with a doctor or pharmacist!

Malaria is transmitted through the bite of a female Anopheles mosquito which carries the pathogen in it because it has previously bitten a person already infected with malaria. This means that if there are no mosquitoes there is no malaria either. Do note, however, that where there are mosquitoes there is not necessarily malaria. Since Namibia does not have much stagnant water the risk of contracting malaria is minimal in most parts of the country, or limited to a specific time of the year.

High-risk areas are the river meadows in the north, north-west and northeast. If this is where you will travel, you are advised to take precautions at any time of the year.

•Kaokoveld, the Etosha National Park, the Otavi Mountains and the east including Bushmanland are areas of medium risk. Precautions are strongly recommended during the rainy season (November to April).

•The risk is small in the area between Otjiwarongo and Windhoek. This does not mean, however, that you should not use mosquito repellent.

•The coast, the Namib Desert and the south are regarded as almost risk-free.

The characteristic symptoms of malaria are similar to those of diarrhoea or flu: high fever with shivering fits, headache and aching limbs, severe sweating and dizziness. Malaria can certainly be treated if recognised early; without treatment it can become life-threatening. Incubation for the disease is four to six weeks. Should you experience cold-like symptoms during this period you see a doctor immediately and inform them that you have been to a malaria area!

Although there is no vaccine against malaria, several prophylactic medicines are available, including homeopathic ones. Ask your doctor or one of the many institutes for tropical diseases for advice. In most European countries malaria prophylaxis is available on prescription only. In Namibia it is sold over the counter and it often costs less than overseas. Doctors and pharmacists in Namibia can also advise you on

which prophylactic to choose. Usually you need to start taking the tablets one week before you travel to a malaria area and continue for four weeks afterwards. Unfortunately there is no protection on which you can rely 100%. Should you notice any of the symptoms despite taking prophylaxis, you should still see a doctor without delay. However, due to the prophylaxis the test may show positive even if you only suffer from a cold and you might be treated for malaria without having the illness. In addition, malaria tablets are known to cause nausea, illusions and upset stomachs. With this in mind, many people discard the prophylaxis and rely on the most effective protection - avoid mosquito bites!

**This is how you keep mosquitoes at a distance:**

- Put on repellent, especially in the evening, at night and in the morning. Effective repellents like 'Peaceful Sleep' and 'Tabard' are widely available in Namibia.

- At dusk and during the night wear clothes which cover arms and legs and choose light colours.

- Use insect sprays or repellent incense sticks and spirals in your room. These are available in supermarkets and pharmacies.

- Sleep under a mosquito net which is usually fixed above your bed if you are in a high-risk area.

- If you sleep in a tent, make sure that the flap and windows are fitted with mosquito gauze.

- If you need a mosquito net, purchase one. They are available at most NamPost branches and safari outfitters, and they are sold directly by 'Mossi Nets' in Otavi (P.O. Box 163, Otavi, Tel and Fax +264 (0)67 234011, additional Fax 242899).

### **Stomach & Bowels**

Stomach upsets are quite common when travelling internationally. Diarrhoea is a reaction to bacteria which are unfamiliar to your intestines. Change in climate can also play a role. Make sure that you have a remedy for diarrhoea in your first-aid kit. Fruits and vegetables as well as ice-cream are mostly imported from South Africa. In general, fresh produce is sprayed and washed or otherwise pre-treated and can be enjoyed without hesitation, don't maintain a high meat diet while travelling

### **Potable Water**

The quality of tap water is excellent in most places, although taste may vary: in Windhoek the water is highly chlorinated, in Swakopmund and Sesriem for example there is a slightly soapy taste. You might want to use bottled water, available at supermarkets and petrol stations, for making coffee and tea. Water from the boreholes of farms and Lodges usually has a wonderfully pure taste. Water from stagnant bodies, however, should always be boiled and/or treated with purifying tablets (e.g. Puritabs), which are available in pharmacies.

### **Snakes & Scorpions**

Just to put you at ease: most visitors never see a snake or scorpion during their stay in Namibia. In any event, about 75% of Namibia's snakes are not poisonous. Most snakes beat a hasty retreat when humans approach and therefore are never spotted – they pick up the tremors caused by footsteps. The lazy puff adder may become dangerous, as it is not able to disappear fast enough and you might unwittingly get too close. When walking in the 'wilds' you should always wear sturdy shoes, preferably covering the ankle. Watch your step and listen to sounds – snakes usually warn you before they attack. Refrain from picking up or turning pieces of rock, and do not put your hand into holes in the ground or into rock crevices, as these are favourite hiding places for snakes and scorpions. Always carry a torch in the

dark. When camping, zip your tent completely and shake out your shoes before putting them on in the morning.

#### **Other Illnesses**

Bilharzia is transmitted by worms. They occur only in stagnant water in some places in the north-eastern Kavango Region and in the Kwando-Linyanti-System.

Sleeping Sickness is transmitted by the Tsetse Fly which resembles a horsefly. This sickness occasionally occurs in the Caprivi.

Rabies can be transmitted by all warm-blooded animals. Be careful if untamed wild animals (like ground squirrels) behave very friendly!

Tick Fever / Meningitis is transmitted by ticks. Visitors usually encounter them only when in close contact with cattle, game or dogs or when spending time in sandy riverbeds. Both illnesses occur very seldom.

#### **Medicines & Pharmacies**

Namibian pharmacies are more like a traditional chemist's shop. The pharmacy section is usually limited to an area behind a counter in the back of the premises. Most pharmacists are available to give sound advice. Many types of medicines are available without prescription and cost less than in Europe or North America. Stock up on your supply of medicines in time as only the larger towns have pharmacies. Some pharmacies have extended hours and some run emergency services. Pharmacies are listed in the Yellow Pages of the telephone directory. Contact the local hospital in emergencies during weekends and after hours.

#### **Doctors & Hospitals**

Medical care in towns and cities is excellent, especially in the capital city, Windhoek. There are several private clinics which maintain international standards. Most remote towns have a modest hospital or first-aid-clinic. All of them are listed on the first page of the local telephone directory under 'Emergency Services'. Doctors' listings are located in 'Orange Pages' under 'Classified Medical Listings'. Alternatively, ask your accommodation establishment for recommendations. Since Namibia is scarcely populated and the distances between towns and villages are vast, bear in mind that in some places it may take the majority of a day to reach a doctor or a hospital.

#### **Rescue Service & 'Flying Assistance'**

Competent assistance by ambulance or ambulance plane is offered by International SOS:

P.O. Box 31220, Windhoek

24 hour emergency service

Tel +264 - (0)61 - 23 05 05

Fax +264 - (0)61 - 24 81 13

#### **Insurance**

It is advisable to take out foreign travel health insurance which includes cover for repatriation. Such insurance is offered by tour operators and other organisations such as credit card companies or automobile associations. When signing for insurance ensure that the cost for emergency flights within Namibia is covered. Also enquire whether the insurer will settle directly immediately. Depending on the distance, the cost of air rescue service can easily amount to several thousand Namibia Dollars which you may be required to settle immediately in cash or by credit card. Tour operators often offer additional insurance cover.

Foreign visitors can also take out travel insurance directly in Namibia. It covers air rescue within the country, however, please note that the insurance will only become valid three days after signing for it. For further details contact the following providers:

Tourism & Wildlife Risk Consultants

Wiltrud Rugheimer

Tel. +264 - (0)61 – 23 10 12

Fax. +264 - (0)61 – 23 14 08

Email: [travel@gfare.com.na](mailto:travel@gfare.com.na)

#### **Stored Blood**

Namibia's Blood Transfusion Service only uses blood donations by unpaid volunteers. Donations are thoroughly tested for transmittable diseases, including HIV. Tests are carried out according to internationally recognised standard methods and are regularly submitted to strict quality controls.

Even though this information has been compiled with great care, it is supplied without guarantee. Suggestions are always welcome.