

April 28, 2006

Dear AMIGOS Volunteer:

Congratulations on your decision to participate in the AMIGOS program. AMIGOS' highest priority is your safety and health. We want to emphasize that your personal health practices are the first line of defense for staying well in Latin America. We encourage you to look closely at your Volunteer Handbook for more information on personal health and safety. Your personal health habits also contribute to your credibility as a model health worker in your host community.

In the United States, we often take basic public health conditions, such as cleanliness of water and food, safety on the roads, mosquito and insect control for granted. In the US, we can live safely and healthily without paying close attention to basic health practices such as washing hands frequently, decontaminating our water, knowing which foods are safe to eat, taking immediate care of cuts and scrapes and using appropriate insect bite precautions.

In AMIGOS project areas in Latin America, the public health infrastructure may be weaker than in the US. Therefore, your own personal health habits are essential for you to stay well. Here are some basic guidelines for staying healthy:

**Protection from insect borne diseases:**

- Avoid restaurants where food may be kept outside and/or uncovered.
- Avoid cologne and scented deodorants, oils and creams – they attract bugs.
- Always wear shoes.
- Avoid swimming in fresh water lakes and ponds.
- Use insect repellent with 20-30% DEET daily.
- Wear long sleeves, skirts, and long pants, especially at dusk and dawn, when mosquitoes are most active.
- Use mosquito netting when sleeping
- To prevent malaria take the medication appropriate for your project. This medication must be taken once a week, beginning 2 weeks before your departure to Latin America. The medication must also be taken each week during your time in Latin America, and taken weekly for 4 weeks after returning home. Volunteers assigned to Brazil, Guanajuato, Panama, Paraguay, and Uruguay are **not** required to take malaria prophylaxis.

Following these recommendations is important. In the past there have been cases of malaria and dengue among volunteers who did not adhere to these recommendations.

**Prevention of diarrhea:**

- Drink only treated or bottled water and bottled drinks.
- Purify water by boiling it or by using iodine tablets or chlorine drops. Boiling water for use can set a good example for your host family. When using iodine and chlorine tablets, allow at least 30 minutes for the decontamination process to work. Water may need to sit for 60 minutes if it is cold. Vitamin C tablets can eliminate the chemical taste but should only be added after the water is properly decontaminated.
- Use ONLY treated water to brush your teeth and to rinse your mouth and toothbrush.
- Avoid street food. Eat only hot food in restaurants. Eat only fruit that you peel.
- Always wash your hands before eating and after using the bathroom.
- For culturally sensitive ways of following these recommendations in your host community, ask your project supervisor.

**Treatment of diarrhea:**

- The first treatment for mild diarrhea is to drink fluids: water, soup, broth, and mineral water.
- Pepto Bismol or Imodium AD can be taken for mild-moderate symptoms. If your diarrhea persists, activate your C.A.L.M. plan and contact your project supervisor. Mild-moderate symptoms mean no fever, no vomiting and no more than 3 diarrhea episodes in 24 hours. **NOTE: The Medical Advisory Committee of the IO Board of Directors recently approved a special protocol for the initial treatment of diarrhea. The protocol is as follows: A volunteer will be allowed to carry a prescription medication on his person from his/her private MD to take in the event of Travelers' Diarrhea. This is defined as diarrhea occurring less than 6 times a day, without**

*fever of 101 degrees Fahrenheit or higher, without blood and occurring within 7 days of arrival. This treatment should consist of a single dose of either Ciprofloxacin or Levofloxacin 500mg or Azithromycin 500mg. Symptoms that continue for more than 48 hours after the dose should require the volunteer to seek medical treatment.*

**Skin care, heat, and altitude:**

- Treat cuts, blisters, and abrasions with great care. Use lots of soap and water. Take a topical antibiotic with you.
- Take and use sunscreen and a hat.
- Drink plenty of fluids daily.

**Orthopedic Injuries:**

- Orthopedic injuries are difficult to properly evaluate and treat in the field. Be careful about activities that may place you at risk for injury, such as aggressive hiking, jogging, and soccer games.

**AMIGOS Standards of Conduct and Community Behavior:**

- The AMIGOS Standards of Conduct are in place for your safety and health and have been developed by volunteers and program staff. These rules are taken very seriously. If you have any questions about these rules, discuss them with your trainers or project supervisor.

**Animal Bites:**

- Animals are treated differently in Latin America than in the US, and in many cases they are not considered pets. Many dogs and cats are malnourished, poorly treated by North American standards and have not received immunizations. **Avoid contact with all animals**, even if you know their temperament. Even in friendly play, an animal can scratch or bite, in which case the rabies exposure protocol must be implemented.

**First Aid Kit:**

- Here are my recommendations for your first aid kit:
  1. Band aids, tape, gauze pads, first aid cream (Polysporin, Bacitracin)
  2. Tylenol or aspirin
  3. Decongestant (Sudafed)
  4. Sunscreen (SPF 15 or greater)
  5. Imodium AD or Pepto Bismol tablets
  6. Water purification tablets (Potable Agua)
  7. Scabicide (Kwell or Rid)
  8. Vaginal yeast medication for women
  9. Insect repellent with 20-30% DEET
  10. Thermometer
- Each project will have a medication kit to be used at the direction of the medical on-call staff.
- You must tell your project staff of any medical or psychiatric conditions you have, as well as any prescription medications you may be taking. Bring enough of your prescription medication for the entire summer.

Best wishes for a healthy and fun summer

Sincerely,

Diane Lorence, MD  
AMIGOS Medical Director

Glenn Bayron, MSW  
Director of Volunteer Administration