

Vaccine Preventable Diseases

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In recent years, many people visit various regions around the world to study abroad and travel. They have their own various experiences of daily lives in different societies and different cultures. So, they are broadening their perspectives on the world. Even while in Japan, international students and travelers come from around the world and interact with us, so our society becomes broader. At the same time, however, such a multicultural society where students may interact with many people can also create an environment in which various infectious diseases can be easily spread.

“Vaccine-Preventable Diseases (VPD)” are infectious diseases that should be preventable with vaccines and that can only be prevented with vaccines. There are still many infectious diseases in the world that are life-threatening, fatal, have no established treatments, or have serious after-effects.

When you hear the word "vaccine," you might think "I have already been vaccinated in childhood," or "I'm an adult now, thus vaccinations don't relate to me."

In fact, now you're a university student or an adult, and in a society where you interact more with the world, it is an important time to check about your vaccinations and immunity. Some infectious diseases are more likely to spread among university students in close-contact group settings such as university lectures, club activities, and dormitory life. Also, the effectiveness of childhood vaccinations may decrease over time, potentially reducing antibody titers. In addition, some infectious diseases can be more severe and have a higher risk of complications if contracted as an adult. Therefore, it is a good time for you to review your vaccination and medical history, including whether you have missed or insufficiently received vaccines or have low antibody titers for certain infectious diseases (which requires blood tests for evaluation), and consider whether you require vaccinations.

The benefits of vaccination include (1) individual-level protection: reducing the chance of being infected and preventing it from becoming more severe, (2) population-level protection: preventing an epidemic in society and protecting those who cannot be vaccinated and the elderly, etc. Also, (3) some vaccines can even relate to the prevention of cancer.

Among "vaccine-preventable diseases (VPDs)," there are relatively well-known VPDs that are prevented by childhood vaccines, such as measles, rubella, mumps, chickenpox, and Japanese encephalitis. However, there are also VPDs that are more susceptible during adolescence and young adulthood, such as meningococcal disease, human papillomavirus infection, and hepatitis B, as well as VPDs that require caution when traveling abroad, such as hepatitis A, yellow fever, rabies, and tick-borne encephalitis. There are also VPDs for which vaccination-induced immunity weakens over time, such as tetanus and diphtheria, and VPDs that prevent the onset and worsening of infectious diseases in preparation for epidemics, such as influenza and COVID-19. These infectious diseases all have different pathogens and different transmission routes, and they vary in symptoms, severity, and after-effects. The duration for which antibody titers are maintained also varies. In addition, the incidence and prevalence of infections, as well as the state of social herd immunity, vary by region. If you are considering traveling abroad, including for study abroad, be sure to check the infectious disease information for your destination region in advance and confirm whether vaccinations are required before traveling. Furthermore, in order to stay healthy while studying abroad, be sure to check the precautions you should take in daily life, including measures to protect yourself from mosquitoes and

animals.

Even if it's not related to travel or studying abroad, global human interaction has increased in recent years. And medical treatment that suppresses the immune system has been increasing with the advance of medical treatment technology, so you or a loved one may receive such immunosuppressive treatment at some point. Therefore, in addition to taking measures at the individual level, it is also very important to prevent infectious diseases from spreading through herd immunity.

First, check your “Maternal and Child Health Handbook” to confirm your vaccination history and review your important vaccination records. Then, think positively about getting the necessary vaccinations to prevent the spread of preventable infectious diseases.

If you have any questions, please consult the Health Care Center, TUFs.

References:

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<https://www.who.int/travel-advice/vaccines>

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<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/english/posters-about-vaccination.html>

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<https://www.japan.travel/en/guide/vaccines-for-japan/>