

The US Immigration Health Assessment: Frequently Asked Questions

MAIN HEALTH ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

Q1. Who defines the rules and standards for the immigration health assessments?

The scope and standards of the immigration health assessments are defined by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta. Medical practitioners, who conduct the health assessments, and the US embassies, who process the applications, are implementing CDC's Technical Instructions for Medical Examinations of Aliens.

Q2. Who can conduct the medical examination for the US visa?

The medical examination must be conducted by a medical doctor (civil surgeon) who has been designated by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). In Nepal, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), is designated as a panel physician for the medical examinations of the immigrants to the US.

Q3. Can my own physician do this medical examination or some tests?

No, medical examination and all obligatory tests must be carried out by IOM. Results from other medical facilities will not be accepted by the US Embassy. You are advised, however, to bring previous medical records, if you have or have had any chronic condition or have undergone surgery (excluding removal of gallbladder, appendix or tonsils, other minor surgeries and minor traumas) or hospital treatment.

Q4. I have recently had chest X-ray, will it be accepted if I bring the film and the report?

No, you will have to have your X-ray at IOM. It is, however, useful for you to bring a previously taken X-ray to the examination for comparison.

Q5. What does health assessment consist of?

The scope of health assessment depends on your age and your health condition.

For applicants of 15 years or older, the basic examination includes a physical examination, a blood test for syphilis, a chest X-ray and vaccinations.

For applicants 2 to 14 years, the basic examination includes a physical examination, a Tuberculin Skin Test (TST) and vaccinations. If the TST is positive, a chest X-ray is required.

For children younger than 2 years, the basic examination includes physical examination and vaccinations.

Q6. Will I have to undergo a chest X-ray if I am pregnant? Can I have some other test instead of an X-ray?

A chest X-ray is an obligatory test for all applicants of 15 years and above and some children. There are no exemptions. No other test can replace the chest X-ray. However, you may choose to postpone the X-ray examination until delivery. In that case, your medical examination will not be completed and documents will not be submitted to the Embassy. If you choose to undergo chest X-ray, you will be provided with double protection (shielding) of your abdomen. The IOM doctor will discuss this with you.

Q7. What does Tuberculin Skin Test (TST) show? Who needs to have this test? How is it done?

A TST shows if you are infected with Mycobacterium tuberculosis, the organism, which causes tuberculosis (TB). If the test is positive, it does not mean that you have TB, but it means that the microorganism is inside your body. It can "sleep" for many years without causing disease, or it may become active and cause TB. A TST is given to children of 2 to 14 years old and people who are in close contact with TB patients, regardless of age.

Q8. How is TST done?

The test consists of two steps. At first, a substance called tuberculin is injected into the skin of a forearm. 48-72 hours after the injection a trained nurse or a physician measures the reaction. That is why children of 2 to 14 years and other applicants who need the TST must visit IOM twice.

Q9. What happens if my child has a positive TST?

If your child has a positive TST, a chest X-ray will be taken. If the X-ray is normal, there will be no additional tests and the examination will be completed. If the X-ray is abnormal the child will have to undergo further evaluation for TB.

Q10. What happens if my chest X-ray is not normal?

If your chest X-ray suggests that you may have TB now or you may have had it even in the remote past, you will be asked to produce sputum on three consecutive mornings. An IOM laboratory staff will help you to collect sputum. Your sputum specimens will be sent to a TB laboratory which will perform tests to see if you have Mycobacterium tuberculosis.

Q11. The IOM information sheet says that my whole body will be examined. Does it include private parts?

Yes, the examination includes visual inspection of external genitalia and a breast examination. Please be assured that the examination will be conducted with maximum discretion, and that you can request a same-gender medical professional to do it or to serve as a chaperon.

Q12. What happens if I have a chronic disease, e.g., diabetes or hypertension?

Many people have chronic diseases and in the vast majority of cases, chronic diseases adequately treated are not an obstacle to immigration. Therefore, applicants should not attempt to hide chronic diseases. If the condition is severe and not well controlled, or if the diagnosis cannot be done based on clinical findings only, you may be referred for additional investigations or specialist consultations. If you bring your medical records to IOM, it may contain useful information, and thus speed up processing of the health assessment.

Q13. If I am referred for an additional investigation, do I have to pay?

Yes, the cost of additional investigations, consultations and treatments, except for investigations and treatments for TB and syphilis, is not included in the IOM service fee and must be settled by the applicant separately.

Q14. Will I be tested for HIV?

An HIV test is no longer obligatory for US visa applicants. If you wish, IOM will perform an HIV test free of charge; in this case, the result will be recorded in your medical documents.

Q15. What happens if I am tested positive for syphilis?

You will get treated at IOM at no additional cost. After treatment is completed, the disease will not pose an obstacle to immigration.

Q16. Who will see results of my tests?

IOM treats medical information with the upmost confidentiality. Only authorized IOM personnel, concerned US Embassy staff and health authorities in the US will have access to your medical documentation.

Q17. Will I be informed about results of my health assessment? If yes, when and how?

Yes. The IOM doctor will inform you of medical examination results as soon as they are available. Some results may come later. If, based on these results, the doctor determines that you need additional testing, IOM will telephone you and invite you to MHAC. It is important that you provide IOM with one or more correct contact numbers. Please note, IOM DOES NOT PROVIDE MEDICAL EXAMINATION RESULTS OR INFORMATION BY PHONE FOR CONFIDENTIALITY REASONS.

Q18. How long does it take to complete the process?

In the majority of cases, the medical examination is completed within one or two days. However, if you need additional examinations, it may take longer. Please discuss timelines with the examining physician.

Q19. How will I know if my documents have been sent to the US Embassy?

Once your documents are sent to the US Embassy, IOM will inform you by SMS or phone. Again, it is important that you provide correct contact information.

Q20. Will I receive medical documents or copies?

Once your medical examination is completed (including any additional investigations and treatments, if required), you will receive X-ray film(s), which you should take to the US. You will not receive copies of medical documents or reports. Medical documents, generated during the health assessment, are owned exclusively by the US immigration authorities. IOM is not authorized to provide copies to applicants.

Q21. What should I do if I miss the appointment? Can I come later or on another day?

You should contact IOM by phone and re-schedule your appointment. Please do not come without a prior appointment. If you know that you are going to miss the appointment, please call and inform IOM as soon as possible.

TB TESTING AND TREATMENT

Q22. Do I need to pay for sputum tests?

No, you do not need to pay additionally for sputum tests.

Q23. Can I collect sputum at home and bring to the clinic?

No, it is required that the sputum be collected under the direct supervision of IOM staff. There are no exceptions to this rule.

Q24. If I need to undergo sputum tests, how long will it take?

There are two obligatory sputum tests: sputum smears and sputum cultures. Results of sputum smears will be known one or two days after sputum collection. Results of sputum cultures may take 8 weeks after sputum collection.

Q25. Will my application be processed while I am waiting for the results of the sputum tests?

No. The health assessment is not complete until all results are received.

Q26. Do I need to stay in Kathmandu and wait for the results of sputum tests?

No, you do not have to remain in Kathmandu, but please make sure IOM is in possession of accurate contact numbers, so that IOM can contact you when results are known. You can get the results only by presenting yourself at MHAC in person. IOM DOES NOT PROVIDE INFORMATION ABOUT RESULTS OF MEDICAL EXAMINATION BY PHONE FOR CONFIDENTIALITY REASONS.

Q27. Will I be denied a US visa if I am diagnosed with TB?

Your application will not be processed until your TB is successfully treated. Once the treatment is completed, it will not be an obstacle for immigration to the US.

Q28. Where can I get TB treatment?

According to US health regulations for the immigrants, you must receive treatment under the direct supervision of the medical professionals designated by the US immigration services. In Nepal the only designated professional institution for the US applicants is IOM Nepal. Thus, you need to receive treatment from IOM Nepal in order to qualify for the US visa.

Q29. How long does TB treatment takes?

It depends on the type of TB you have. In the majority of cases, the treatment takes 6 (six) months, but sometimes it may take 9 (nine) months or longer.

Q30. Does this mean I will have to stay in Kathmandu for 6 months or longer?

Yes, you need to stay in Kathmandu for the entire duration of treatment and visit IOM every day, except weekends, to receive the medicines under a direct observation of an IOM professional.

Q31. Can IOM give me TB medicines for me to take them at home?

No, this will not count as a treatment administered by the designated medical professional.

Q32. Can my own doctor administer TB treatment and certify it?

No, this will not count as a treatment administered by the designated medical professional.

Q33. What will happen if I still decide to get TB treatment at home and bring the record?

If you were diagnosed with TB while applying for the US visa, your visa application will not be processed until you have completed treatment at IOM.

Q34. If I was treated for TB in the past (before health assessment at IOM) will I be re-treated?

You will undergo a check up for TB at IOM, including sputum tests. If the results show that the previous treatment was successful, you will not have to be re-treated and your documents will be cleared.

If the results show that you still have TB, you will be re-treated.

It is extremely important that you share with IOM previous chest X-rays and detailed records of your treatment to prove that you received adequate treatment. Remember, previous TB treatment is NOT an

obstacle to immigration processing, if it was successful. Do not try to conceal it. The more information you provide during health assessment, the sooner your file will be processed.

Q35. If I need TB treatment, do I have to pay for it?

No, you do not have to pay additionally for treatment and regular laboratory and X-ray investigations on treatment. However, you will have to shoulder any costs related to your stay in Kathmandu.

Q36. What happens if I cannot stay in Kathmandu for the whole duration of treatment?

Your application will not be processed without medical clearance.

VACCINATIONS

Q37. Who needs vaccinations?

Everybody, regardless of age, but the number and types of vaccines depend on the age.

Q38. Which vaccines do I need?

Please, refer to the vaccination information sheet.

Q39. My mother is 76 years old, does she need vaccinations?

Yes, she needs vaccinations appropriate for her age. There is no age limit for vaccinations.

Q40. I had measles (or other vaccine-preventable disease) in childhood, and my doctor can certify it, do I need to be vaccinated against measles?

Yes, you will need to have the vaccine regardless, unless you have a laboratory proof of immunity (high titer of specific antibodies). Please note, IOM does not perform this kind of laboratory tests.

Q41. Some vaccines require multiple doses. Do I need to get all dosed?

For your own sake, you should get as many doses as recommended and feasible, but only one dose of each vaccine administered at IOM will be sufficient to complete your health assessment.

Q42. Do I need to pay additionally for vaccinations?

Yes. The cost of vaccines is not included in the service fees. Different applicants require different number and types of the vaccines, which will be determined by the IOM physician during the health assessment.

Q43. I had some vaccinations in the past and I have a record of them. Should I bring it?

Absolutely! It may help to reduce the number of vaccinations. Please note that the vaccination record should bear a legible name and the contact details of the health care provider or medical facility that issued the record. Attempts to submit fraudulent records will be reported to the US Embassy.

Q44. Is it safe to get many vaccines at the same time?

Yes, studies in the US and other countries have proved that simultaneous administration of multiple vaccines is as safe and effective as administration of these vaccines at intervals. It is a common practice to administer vaccines at the same time.

Q45. What are contraindications for vaccinations? If I have a chronic illness, is it safe for me to receive vaccines?

For contraindications, please refer to vaccine information sheets. Your medical history will be reviewed by a doctor prior to the administration of vaccinations, and the doctor will inform you if vaccines are contraindicated for your condition.

Q46. Will I receive a vaccination certificate?

Yes, you will receive a vaccination certificate in English, identifying the vaccines you were given. IOM advises you to keep this certificate and take it with you to the US. Your children will need it while enrolling into school and this certificate will help to reduce the number of additional vaccinations that might be required in the US. IOM also encourages you to continue the vaccination series, either in Nepal or in the US.