



WELCOME TO MEDICO!

We are excited you are thinking about joining a MEDICO team!

This document is intended to tell what you can expect as a volunteer with MEDICO. MEDICO teams can be very, very different from one another. Teams work as clinical providers, instructors, lay volunteers or maybe construction supervisors. Team members may be doctors, dentists, nurses, optometrists, technicians, therapists, carpenters, teachers or lay volunteers. Teams typically range from 5-20 volunteers. Field teams may work in a town setting or at remote sites in the tropical forest. While it is impossible to go into a lot of detail on every type of team, there are some things that are in common with all our teams.

If you see a team or opportunity that interests you, we invite you to submit an application. If you have further questions please email info@medico.org. We are happy to put you in touch with someone who has done similar work.

Safe travels!

The MEDICO Board and Staff

PRE-TRIP PLANNING:

Helpful information as you start planning to join a MEDICO trip!

Your Trip Leaders

Each team has one or two team leaders, whose job it is to coordinate and prepare volunteers and to supervise the team's travel and work on site. If you are accepted on a team, your team leader(s) will be in touch with you quickly, well before the trip. They will help explain the trip specifics, what you need to pack, etc. Please don't hesitate to contact them anytime with questions or concerns. If you have questions and cannot reach your team leader, you can email info@medico.org.

Passports / Visas

1. You will need a passport that **must be good for 6 months beyond your return date**. Please check your passport right away to check whether you need to get it renewed. It can sometimes take months to get a new passport. There are some services that offer expedited turnaround, but don't leave this to the last moment.
2. At the current time, persons holding US, Canadian or British passports do not need visas to visit Honduras. If you hold a passport from another country, contact your local consulate to determine requirements for entering Honduras.
3. Three days prior to your departure, you will need to pre-register online with the Honduran Immigration authorities at <https://prechequeo.inm.gob.hn/Login> . Your team leaders will be giving you instructions on how to complete the form.
4. In March, 2023, Honduras discontinued its requirement that persons entering the country show proof of COVID vaccination. However, MEDICO encourages volunteers to have their original vaccination card with them when passing through immigration in the event it is requested.

Medical Preparations

1. **COVID INFORMATION.** Honduras does not require proof of COVID vaccination. However, some new cases of COVID continue to be reported in Honduras. MEDICO requires that volunteers have received COVID vaccination, and strongly recommends that if your original vaccination or prior booster was completed more than six months before the trip, you should get a booster.
2. **Make a travel medicine appointment to talk with your health care provider about medical preparations.** These preparations can include vaccinations, medications, or other steps you should take. When you make your appointment, let them know it is for travel and where you are going. This gives them a chance to review all the pertinent materials and latest guidelines.
3. **Malaria.** Malaria exists in some of the places MEDICO works. It isn't common, but it does exist. Malaria is caused by a parasite spread by some mosquitoes. In these areas, MEDICO requires that team members have and take malaria prophylactic medication. There are several different malaria medications. Talk to your health care provider about which is the best one for you. If you'd like to know more before you sign up, contact us, and we'll give you the details on any team you are considering.

4. Stomach Problems We get a lot of questions about traveler's diarrhea. The bad news is that stomach upset is relatively common, although most of our volunteers don't experience a problem. The good news is that it is typically quite minor and transient. The first step is prevention. Once in Honduras, don't drink tap or well water. We bring all our drinking water with us or buy it along the way. Don't eat food unless you know it has been prepared in a sanitary manner. We eat in places we know to be safe or prepare our own food. Wash your hands. We provide hand sanitizer at the worksite and hand-washing stations. Prophylactic antibiotics are not recommended to prevent traveler's diarrhea, but antibiotics can be helpful in some cases for treatment if you get diarrhea. Talk to your health care provider. Your team leaders will also discuss this in detail as the trip gets near.

5. Vaccinations other than COVID. There are no government required vaccinations other than COVID. However, MEDICO requires that you be up-to-date on your tetanus vaccine. Also, typhoid exists in Central America. Immunization for typhoid is recommended, but not required. Volunteers who will be providing direct patient care should also have hepatitis immunizations.

6. Medications. If you are taking a prescription medication, carry it with you in the original bottle in case there are security questions at the airport. Please carry enough for the duration of the trip. Many of MEDICO's worksites are remote and replenishment of medications may not be easy or even possible. MEDICO does recommend that each volunteer pack a personal first aid kit which contains a few common OTC medications. Your team leaders will provide details. (For MEDICO medical trips, the team will have an extensive pharmacy, which will be available for use if a volunteer becomes ill.)

Packing List

MEDICO has provided a suggested packing list (Appendix A). It may differ a bit depending on where your team is working and the time of year. A few general suggestions are provided below. Your team leaders will share specifics for your trip.

- Leave valuables at home. Do not wear jewelry that dangles or can be grabbed. If you usually wear an expensive watch, you might think about buying an inexpensive one to take on the trip instead.
- Your luggage will get dirty and beat up. Using older luggage is suggested, if available.
- In general, the areas where we work are hot during the day, so you will want clothes that are cool and comfortable. Depending on the location of your worksite, it might get a bit cool at night. Raingear or an umbrella are good things to carry with you.
- Many volunteers use backpacks, daypacks or fanny packs.
- MEDICO discourages giving out candy, toys, money, etc. to the local children. Their parents often disapprove of children begging. If you want to bring something, bring school supplies such as pencils, crayons, stickers, chalk, or even a soccer ball that can be donated to the local school for all the kids to share.

Spending Money

The cost of all your food, lodging, and transportation in-country is included in the trip fee. Team members may wish to have \$75-100 in cash for souvenirs, snacks and drinks along the way.

The process of changing dollars for local currency (lempiras) will vary depending on where you serve and what day of the week you arrive. One peculiarity, however, is that if you want to convert dollars to local currency, your dollars must be absolutely pristine – no marks, rips or permanent folds. Your team leaders will provide details.

When in-country, do not rely on the ability to use ATMs. They are often unreliable and their hours are unpredictable. Credit cards can occasionally be used in the cities and larger towns, but it is best not to rely on them.

Physical Shape

You don't have to be an Olympic athlete to join a team, but you should be realistic about your abilities. There may be a bit of walking in and around the community in which your team serves. You will also assist with loading and unloading of team supplies and luggage. You might have to climb in and out of a truck or a boat (with assistance). More to the point, you will be working for hours in a hot climate. MEDICO has trips at a variety of levels. If you have any questions, email info@medico.org and we will put you in contact with someone who can answer your questions.

TRAVEL PLANNING:

Information on flight arrangements, checking bags and knowing what to expect at the airport in Central America

Flights

You are responsible for making your own flight arrangements to and from the first airport in Central America. In Honduras, that will likely be San Pedro Sula. Your team will assemble at the arrival airport on a certain day and time. Your team leaders will discuss this with you well before you need to make your reservations.

MEDICO asks that you provide your flight information prior to the trip. We provide this information to your team leaders, as they will be meeting you at the airport.

Checking Luggage

For some reason, baggage generates more questions than almost anything else. MEDICO's only rule is that you need to be able to carry all your baggage yourself in one trip. We strongly recommend using two bags – a larger one with most of your clothes and gear and a smaller one with your valuables and daily needs. Both need to have ID tags.

Please be sure you check your airline's baggage policy well before traveling. Each airline is different. One airline might allow two free checked bags or just one or none. We can't keep up, so just check the policy before you buy your ticket. In general, most airlines limit regular luggage by size and a certain weight, usually 50 lbs. Check before you fly. Excess baggage fees are your responsibility and can be expensive.

Occasionally, MEDICO will ask a volunteer to carry team supplies along with their personal baggage. If this results in an excess baggage fee, MEDICO will reimburse you.

When you arrange your flights, try to assure adequate time between connections so that your checked bags can arrive on time. We will leave the international airport immediately after all volunteers have

arrived and travel to the worksite. If you or your bag is delayed due to a missed connection, arrangements will be made to accommodate any issues.

IN-COUNTRY PLANNING:

Information about local transportation, accommodations, the worksite, and personal conduct

Honduras has the reputation of being a dangerous place. We'll get into specifics below, but with the exception of some inner city areas, Honduras is no more or less dangerous than any developing country. In more than 30 years of working in Honduras, MEDICO has only experienced a few random and minor thefts.

Large cities like San Pedro Sula, Tegucigalpa and a few of their outlying communities are tough places. We don't spend any appreciable time in cities, other than the night before our departure from Honduras, during which we stay at a nice hotel or BnB in a safe neighborhood.

There is significant drug business in Honduras. However, it is largely a transshipment business of drugs moving from South America to the United States. It takes place at small airstrips in very remote areas. Other than a few suspiciously opulent homes in otherwise very modest villages, you are unlikely to see any sign of the drug business.

Honduras is an extremely poor country. It has very little public infrastructure and not a lot of public services. This includes police. As in most developing nations, the underpaid and understaffed police departments are not the guardians of the peace in Honduras, rather it is the good will and honesty of the people, which fortunately is considerable.

Your cell phone may cost more than many rural Hondurans make in a year. Therefore, if you leave it out on a table, it might well disappear. Keep all of your valuables with you at all times!

What is MEDICO doing about safety? We use reliable drivers from a transportation company we've employed for more than 25 years. MEDICO reserves rooms at hotels and BnBs that are reputable and safe. We try not to drive at night. MEDICO asks that team members always stay in pairs or groups when leaving the worksite and let the team leaders know where you will be.

What can you do? Don't wear expensive jewelry, including watches, or show large amounts of cash. Don't leave your belongings unguarded or sitting out where they could be easily picked up. Keep your belongings inside a closed daypack. Always be aware of your surroundings.

Please do not pet or pick up stray dogs or cats. There is virtually no chance the animal has been vaccinated.

Accommodations

The type of accommodation depends entirely on the area in which you are working. Some teams may stay in a hotel during the work week and all teams will stay in one for their first and last nights. Hotels

vary from business-class hotels to the very basic. Depending on availability, rooms will be shared between two or three people. Bathrooms are often shared. There may be no hot water. We will do our best to make everyone comfortable. Be flexible.

While at the worksite, conditions will vary greatly, depending on where you serve. In larger communities teams may stay in a hotel or bunkhouse. In more remote communities, it is likely you will sleep on a floor in a backpacker style tent. Latrines are more common than bathrooms.

Cell Phones

There will be cell phone coverage in the larger cities and towns. It is easy to buy a local network SIM card at the airport or in most of the larger towns. Once out in the rural areas, there may or may not be cell coverage. There is wifi in most airports and many hotels. It is best to assume you will not have cell or internet access during most of the trip and then be pleasantly surprised if you do. If being connected during your work week is important, let us know, so we can advise you about the specific locations of your team. Emergency communication information will be provided by your team leaders.

Transportation

MEDICO arranges all in-country transportation for a team whether by plane, car, bus, or boat. This is another area where flexibility is key. Some of our teams travel by car or tour bus on paved roads. Others travel on small planes or in open boats. Sometimes, transportation is in the back of a 4WD pickup truck on a rough, backcountry trail.

Food

While traveling, your team will likely eat in small, local restaurants that are safe and clean. Choices may be limited to 2-4 selections, depending on the season and day of the week. Depending on the work site, food may be provided by a host organization or local restaurant. At the remote worksites, a cook is hired to safely prepare food that MEDICO has provided. In developing nations, food is basic. It is very heavy on rice, beans, eggs, yucca, plantains, and tortillas. Although meat or fish is a luxury in remote areas, it will be available to team members while at the worksite. If you have dietary restrictions, please let your team leader know. Each member is responsible for washing their own dishes.

Worksite Set-up

The location of our worksites will vary depending on the trip itinerary.

Our field teams typically set up temporary clinics in community buildings, churches, or schools. Most often, a team will work and sleep in the same location. With most of us working in the same room, it can be noisy and hot. It will also be energetic and fun.

At these worksites we will set up an area for patient intake, a pharmacy, and workstations for medical, dental and eye providers. Our health educators provide classes at a local school or community building, sometimes on a porch or just under a tree. At the end of the week, the team will inventory remaining gear, pack it up and travel back to the city for transport home.

Returning Home

MEDICO teams return to the city the afternoon or evening prior to departure the next day. MEDICO arranges a hotel for that night, along with transport to the airport the next day.

The U.S. recently discontinued its requirement that arriving passengers have a negative COVID test taken within one day of travel. If the rule is reinstated, MEDICO will arrange for these tests to be performed, on the way to the hotel upon our return to the city. You will be provided a printed result to show the airline when you check in.

MEDICO purchases emergency evacuation insurance in the event of serious illness or injury. However, you should also check to see if your own medical insurance will apply during out of country travel. Your team leaders will provide a briefing on this.

Some volunteers may plan to extend their trip and are welcome to do so. **MEDICO covers insurance and expenses only for the days of the trip. Once a volunteer leaves the team at any point during their trip, they are on their own and MEDICO is not responsible for them or costs they might incur.**

Tips

MEDICO covers all gratuities for local staff. We ask that volunteers NOT to give tips or gifts to individual staff members. If someone does an exceptional job, let the team leaders know and we will see the person is rewarded for that.

Photograph/Social Media Policy

We encourage volunteers to take photos during their trip. However, we request that you get permission prior to taking a person's photograph.

PLEASE DO NOT post any photos of minors from the communities you are serving on your social media profiles (Facebook/Instagram/Twitter/etc.) where the minors' faces are clearly seen, making them easily identifiable. Doing so is in direct violation of our policies and, more importantly, international legal compacts.

Personal Conduct

*MEDICO works in rural, often remote, parts of the country. The people in the community are not used to seeing people from other nations and they will be very curious. **MEDICO** takes pride in being positive ambassadors, which simply means that any questionable behavior will not be tolerated. We, at **MEDICO**, feel compassion, warmth, respect, professionalism, and quality care are of utmost importance when we are serving communities in Central America.*

- Alcoholic Beverages: All our teams are trying to promote good health. Many of the areas we visit have had issues with abuse of alcohol, and we do not want to be seen encouraging its use. If you choose to consume alcohol, we ask that you do so responsibly. If your team leader asks you not to consume alcohol, which may be the case in some locations, please abide by their request. If you abuse this policy, you may be asked to return to the United States and not participate on future trips.
- Getting to know local staff and residents is part of the joy of serving in another country. Romantic or sexual relationships between MEDICO team members, local staff or patients will not be tolerated.
- Volunteers will respect the symbols of nationalism and religious practices of the country of assignment.
- Volunteers will abide by the laws, regulations and workplace requirements of the country of assignment. MEDICO is not responsible, in any manner, for a trip participant who is charged with an offense under the laws of the country visited.

- MEDICO is a humanitarian organization. We are not affiliated with any religious organization or church. Some of our members are religious. Some are not. We do not advocate or promote any religion. We do respect the religious beliefs of others and we will respect and be thankful for the generosity of communities allowing us to use their church (often the only large building around) to use as a clinic base.

Closing Thoughts

We know we can't possibly answer every question you may have now, but hopefully you have found this information helpful. Please do not hesitate to reach out to MEDICO by email at info@medico.org or to your team leaders.

We are excited you are thinking of joining us and wish you safe travels! As you think about the work you will do, and the team you will be a part of, we will leave you with this thought:

I cannot do everything, but still, I can do something.

And because I cannot do everything

I will not refuse to do the something that I can do."

-Edward Everett Hale

Appendix A – General Packing List Suggestions

This is a suggested packing list. Some items are optional and/or only needed at certain worksites. Team leaders will provide detailed information on items needed for your specific worksite.

ALL team members must bring the following items.

- Passport
- Original vaccination card
- Airline ticket
- Medical license photocopies
- Travel insurance card from MEDICO
- Pre-arrival immigration form

Money

- Cash for incidentals (\$75-\$100)
- Credit Card (optional)

Luggage

- Checked bag
- Backpack
- Waist pack /day pack

Sleeping / Bedtime

- Tent (MEDICO will provide one if needed)
- Air mattress (MEDICO will provide if needed)
- Sheet for sleeping (at certain worksites)
- Battery-powered travel fan
- Ear plugs (if snoring bothers you)
- Flashlight or headlamp (bring plenty of extra batteries)
- Small pillow (at certain worksites)

Personal Hygiene

- Bath towel
- Personal toiletries (soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, shampoos, small mirror, etc.)
- Personal OTC medications (Pepto Bismol, anti-diarrheal, antihistamine, etc.)
- Personal prescription medications (Malaria, antibiotics, etc.)
- Toilet paper (best kept in Ziploc bag)
- Insect repellent
- Sunscreen
- Hand sanitizer

Clothing

- Shirt/pants for travel and in town wear
- Work clothes (Scrubs, T-shirts, pants, shorts)
- Underwear
- Socks
- Rain jacket / poncho / umbrella
- Hat/Cap/Visor - especially for boat crossing
- Bandana
- Shoes (Comfortable closed toes shoes for clinic hours)
- Flip flops or sandals (for after clinic hours)
- Sunglasses
- Masks / N95s
- Lightweight sweater or jacket

Miscellaneous

- Ziploc bags
- Trash bags (2-3) for dirty clothes
- Camera or iPhone with chargers / charger cord
- Snacks
- Individual drink mixes
- Personal first aid kit (band-aids, gauze, tape, hydrocortisone cream)
- **Water bottle – YOU WILL NEED THIS**
- Coffee mug (at certain worksites)
- Spoon, bowl (at certain worksites.)
- Penknife or multi-tool (in checked bag only)
- Cording or duct tape (optional)
- Kleenex

Medical Personnel - Please bring the following items.

- Stethoscope
- Watch with second hand (strongly recommended if you are taking vital signs)
- Light / flashlight
- Trauma shears (in checked bag only)
- Hand sanitizer (double bagged in checked bag only)
- Extra gloves
- Eye protection
- Sharpie pens (2-3) and a notepad