

## **AVOIDING ILLNESS**

Some volunteers have spent the whole time in Ecuador with no problems. However, most volunteers experience minor abdominal discomfort occasionally, due primarily to the different diet. You're likely to have a bout or two, if there long-term of traveler's diarrhea while in Ecuador. This is usually not serious and is best treated with time, a bland diet (no milk products or fatty, spicy foods) and Pepto-Bismol. You can avoid this by not drinking the water (we provide bottled water) and watching what you eat (fruits and vegetables we buy are washed in bleach water and are safe).

Avoid things that are not well-cooked, especially fruits and vegetables that are grown next to the ground that are not peeled, like strawberries and lettuce. We strongly advise that you not eat strawberries that haven't been cooked/boiled and to not eat lettuce outside of the OSSO house (the lettuce we purchase from the grocery store is organic and safe to eat but elsewhere this isn't guaranteed, though lettuce in nicer restaurants is probably okay). We've found that the volunteers who have not followed this advice have had more stomach problems as well as incidences of parasites, and OSSO will not buy strawberries for any use other than their being cooked/boiled.

We recommend you do not eat ceviche (raw, pickled seafood) at all, and also recommend you do not eat cuy (roasted guinea pig) unless we advise you where to eat it.

Do NOT drink the water!!! We really can't emphasize this enough. We also strongly recommend that you don't even brush your teeth with the water. We provide bottled water—as much as you can possibly naturally drink. We've found that much of the time when volunteers become sick, that they accidentally drank the water, or were lazy and didn't want to go fill up their water bottle from the bottled water dispenser or even wanted to test their luck because they thought they'd be fine. You can become very sick if you drink contaminated water, so why risk it?

Contaminated water can be the source of many infections including hepatitis and parasites, and you can get these from drinking the water, even just once. Water quality can change a lot from day to day or from one part of the city to another. Just because you didn't get sick from the water last time you drank it doesn't mean you won't this time. Different people respond differently to the same water. Local people have spent a lifetime getting used to the water and have built up immunity to the bugs in the water that will make you very sick. In all but the nicest restaurants in Cuenca and Quito they make the juices with tap water, even if they tell you they don't.

Many volunteers have decided to exercise their freedom to choose by drinking the water from the tap. Some have done this regularly without any problems. On the other hand, on many occasions when volunteers have had severe diarrhea and vomiting it has occurred within hours of their first time drinking the tap water.

Cuenca and Quito are both high-altitude cities, so you might need a few days to adjust to the thin Andean air. When you arrive, take it easy for a few days, get as much sleep as you can, eat light meals and make a special effort to stay hydrated. If you do get altitude sickness (symptoms include headache, fatigue, stomach illness, dizziness and sleep disturbance), following the suggestions above will help. Most volunteers don't have problems with this, but there are

medications you can get from your doctor that you take for 3-4 days that will help avoid this problem.

When an illness starts getting passed around and back and forth between you and the children

The following are things that we recommend that everyone does to prevent getting sick and to prevent getting others sick:

- wash hands more frequently than normal (after touching a possibly contaminated surface, after sneezing, coughing, wiping your nose, etc.; after caring for children, changing diapers, before eating, etc.)
- if you're not sick and don't want to become sick, don't touch your eyes/nose/mouth (mucous membranes) if you've touched contaminated surfaces or not washed your hands recently
- if you're eating something, don't lick your fingers unless you washed your hands before eating (which you should have done, but which is common to not have happen when eating out in restaurants)
- if you haven't washed your hands immediately beforehand and have possibly touched a contaminated surface, don't rub your eye or nose when it itches and don't stick your fingers in your mouth (to get that annoying piece of food out from between your teeth or to bite off a torn fingernail, etc.)
- the more contact you have with someone who's sick the more chances there are of germs being passed to you
- if you're sick and you touch your eyes/nose/mouth then immediately wash your hands to prevent the spread of germs
- change hand towels frequently
- put hand sanitizer bottles all around the house so it's readily available and use it (but not to replace hand washing completely); remember about when doorknobs are touched, like when you exit a bathroom that someone touched the knob upon entering and before they washed their hands, same with faucet handles, etc.
- disinfect everything (bedroom and bathroom doorknobs, faucets, telephone keypad and ear and mouth piece, computer keyboard, etc.)
- wash silverware and dishes really well and make sure you washed your hands prior to doing this, otherwise, your having washed the dishes could pass germs on to the next person who uses them
- if you're sick, always cover your mouth when you cough and then go wash your hands right away (it'd be preferable if when you need to cough you cough into a Kleenex that you can throw away or pull your shirt collar up and cough under it to minimize the spray of germs into the air)
- try to make sure you're always minimizing the possible spread of germs to yourself and to others
- don't eat/drink after others (volunteers or the children) and don't let others eat/drink after you
- if you're sick, please be really careful to contain your germs so that hopefully no one else becomes sick because of you (other won't stop liking you, but they also probably don't want to be real chummy with you and in too close of proximity to you while you're sick)

- everyone should try to get as much sleep as needed to stay healthy and stay hydrated by drinking lots of fluids and eating healthy; these things are particularly important if you become sick in order to get well faster

These things should always be followed and emphasized when there's more illness getting passed around to prevent those not already sick from becoming sick and to make sure those who got sick get well faster.