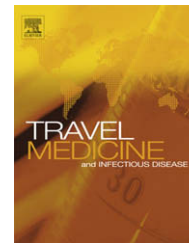




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# Traveling to Canada for the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games

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**Summary** The 21st Winter Olympic Games will be held in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada from February 12 to 28, 2010. Following the Winter Olympic Games, the Winter Paralympic Games will be held from March 12 to 21, 2010. There will be 86 winter sporting events hosted in Vancouver with 5500 athletes staying in two Olympic Villages. Another 2800 members of the media, 25,000 volunteers, and 1 million spectators are expected in attendance. This paper reviews health and safety issues for all travelers to Canada for the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympic Games with a specific focus on pre-travel planning, road and transportation safety in British Columbia, natural and environmental hazards, Olympic medical facilities, safety and security, and infectious disease.

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## Introduction

In recent years the travel medicine literature has published health advice for travelers to the Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games in Sydney, Athens, and Beijing.<sup>1–4</sup> However, no such information has been published for travelers to the Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games. The Winter Olympic Games are a multi-sport event that has been conducted consistently since 1924. The 21st Winter

Olympic Games will be held in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada from February 12 to 28, 2010. The Winter Paralympic Games will be held shortly after from March 12 to 21, 2010. A total of 86 winter sports will be held during the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympic Games. All ice sporting events will be held in the cities of Vancouver and Richmond, Nordic events will be held in the Callaghan Valley near Whistler, all alpine skiing events will be held on Whistler Mountain, all sliding events will be held on Blackcomb Mountain, and all freestyle skiing and snowboarding events will be held on Cypress Mountain (Cypress Provincial Park) in West Vancouver.

Vancouver is known for its spectacular natural surroundings and for being one of the world's most livable cities.<sup>5</sup> Whistler and the surrounding mountain area is the

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largest ski area in North America and Richmond is recognized as a culturally diverse city that is close to both downtown Vancouver and the United States border.<sup>5</sup> It is expected that approximately 5500 athletes will stay in the Vancouver and Whistler Olympic Villages. Another 2800 accredited members of the media, 25,000 volunteers, and over 1 million spectators are also expected to be in attendance. Thus, this paper focuses on relevant health and safety issues for all travelers to the 2010 Winter Games. It is important to note that travel health advice can change rapidly due to environmental conditions, disease outbreaks, and politics.<sup>3</sup> It is therefore recommended that all travelers seek up-to-date health advice from qualified authorities closer to their departure for Vancouver.

## Pre-travel planning

There are no special immunizations or medications necessary for travel to Canada. However, it is recommended that all travelers receive a tetanus–diphtheria vaccine if they have not done so within the last 10 years. It is also recommended that all children be up-to-date on routine immunizations, that all travelers be vaccinated for the measles, mumps, and rubella (two doses if born after 1956), and that all travelers receive an influenza vaccine. The flu season in Canada runs from November through April.

Many of the Olympic visitors to Vancouver will arrive via long-haul flights and face challenges related to jet lag. Jet lag occurs when there is desynchrony between normal daily rhythms and the local environment.<sup>6–8</sup> Travel in an easterly direction tends to produce greater jet lag as it compresses a 24 h day and creates more physiological stress.<sup>6,9</sup> Moreover, it is important to note that circadian rhythms can take several days to adjust if more than five time zones have been crossed.<sup>6,10</sup> To counter the effects of jet lag, some research suggests that 3–5 mg of melatonin be taken at bedtime (local time) on the first evening after arrival and continued for the next 5 days.<sup>7</sup> However, instead of melatonin, the World Health Organization suggests the use of short-acting sedatives.<sup>7</sup> There is no perfect solution to jet lag but it is recommended that travelers limit alcohol intake and exercise during the flight by stretching and walking the aisle of the airplane.<sup>6</sup>

## Road and transportation safety in British Columbia

Motor vehicle crashes have been identified as the most common cause of injury death to tourists.<sup>1,11,12</sup> British Columbia and the rest of Canada drive on the right side of the road and use the metric system for distances and speeds.<sup>13</sup> Wearing seat belts in British Columbia has been mandatory since the 1970s and traffic in both directions must stop when school buses have their red lights flashing.<sup>14</sup> At four-way stop intersections the first vehicle to arrive at the intersection has the right of way. Headlights on vehicles must be on at all times and motorcyclists are required to wear helmets. Moreover, the minimum age for driving in British Columbia is 16 years. Valid driver licenses from foreign countries will be honored for no more than 3 months.

Winter driving conditions are common in British Columbia from late October through March. These conditions can vary from wet roads to snow and ice. If renting a motor vehicle, it is advisable to ensure that you have winter tread on your tires, functioning wiper blades, a car heater, charged battery, and anti-freeze. It is also advisable to check your vehicle brakes at a slow speed. Moreover, during winter driving conditions, it is recommended that drivers drive slowly, allow for extra distance between vehicles, drive in low gear when going down hills, avoid passing, slow down before all curves and corners in the road, and be aware that ice is common on bridges, overpasses, shaded areas, and at intersections.

British Columbia has a well-developed road system and the British Columbia Ministry of Transportation maintains a website at <http://www.drivebc.ca> that has timely updates of all road conditions in the province. The Sea to Sky Highway from Vancouver to Whistler is a winding scenic road that is currently under construction to become a dual-lane road. It is advisable that visitors remain off all gravel roads and all roads used by the logging industry. Additional transportation options involve a daily snow bus that runs between Vancouver and Whistler, the Whistler Mountaineer railway that runs between Vancouver and Whistler, and British Columbia Ferries that operate in coastal areas.

## Natural and environmental hazards

British Columbia experiences a wide range of natural hazards.<sup>15</sup> Earthquakes are common throughout the province with more than 1200 seismic events reported each year.<sup>15</sup> The province even has a history of tsunami events along the Pacific Coast.<sup>16,17</sup> Two of the more pressing hazards, however, are landslides and snow avalanches. Due to a combination of mountainous terrain, high relief, heavy rainfall, seismicity, and landslide-prone materials in the Vancouver region, landslides are a common occurrence.<sup>18</sup> Rock falls, rock slides, and rock avalanches have specifically been a major problem in the Vancouver region and present a constant threat to the main road and railway transportation networks around all Olympic venues.<sup>18,19</sup>

Snow avalanches in British Columbia are also a common occurrence. In fact, British Columbia accounts for 65% of all fatal snow slides in Canada.<sup>20</sup> There is an average of 14 people killed by snow avalanches in Canada each year but at the time of writing, 16 fatalities have been recorded in British Columbia during the 2008–2009 winter season.<sup>20</sup> The provincial government continuously monitors avalanche-prone areas throughout the province using a sophisticated network of electronic weather stations, reports of regional avalanche conditions, avalanche occurrence observations, and field snow condition investigations. Visitors to the Olympics should be aware that snow avalanches can vary in size and that 85% of fatal snow avalanches are triggered by people. Moreover, they can stay current on avalanche conditions by calling the Public Avalanche Bulletin toll free (+1 800 667 1105) from any telephone in Canada and by visiting the Canadian Avalanche Association website at [http://www.avalanche.ca/CAC\\_Bulletin\\_Regions](http://www.avalanche.ca/CAC_Bulletin_Regions).<sup>21,22</sup> In addition, all visitors traveling to the region should:

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