

REPUBLIC OF CONGO
HÔPITAL EVANGÉLIQUE « LE PIONNIER »
VISITORS' INFORMATION PACKET (VIP)

Updated May 2020

We are glad you are interested in coming to serve as a volunteer at Hôpital Evangélique « Le Pionnier ». This packet of information will help you prepare for an adventure in service. Please read it carefully, and refer to it often. It contains important information on:

- Republic of Congo
- Hôpital Evangélique « Le Pionnier »
- Short-term missionary service
- Travel arrangements
- Accommodations
- Raising support
- Estimated costs
- Obtaining visas
- Staying healthy / Malaria prevention
- Travel Immunizations
- What to pack
- Contact Information

REPUBLIC OF CONGO

The [Republic of the Congo](#) is a nation about the size of New York State, located in the heart of Africa, right on the Equator. Congo is home to approximately 5.5 million people. The capital, [Brazzaville](#), is located on the Congo River, right across from Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo. *[Note: To distinguish between the two countries called Congo, we often refer to Republic of Congo as “Congo-Brazzaville,” and Democratic Republic of Congo as “DRC” or “Congo-Kinshasa.” In this packet, “Congo” refers to Congo-Brazzaville, but when you hear about Congo in the news, they are usually referring to DRC.]*

The official language of Congo is French, while Lingala and Munukutuba are the most widely spoken of 67 national languages. The major religions are Christianity, Animism, and Islam.

Congo has 12 regions, called departments, and one commune. The Department of the Likouala, Congo's Northern-most region, is covered with inundated tropical rain forest.

HÔPITAL EVANGÉLIQUE « LE PIONNIER »

HELP is dedicated to God for the purpose of providing healthcare services as a wholistic expression of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

HELP is a 65-bed general mission hospital located in Impfondo (pop. 90,000), capital of the Department of the Likouala (pop. 303,000). The hospital's 38 buildings are situated on a 17-acre campus, on the northern edge of town. Services include: Laboratory, Imaging, Pharmacy, Chaplaincy, Emergency, Maternity, Pediatrics, Internal Medicine, Surgery, and Outpatient Consultation. The hospital also has programs for HIV/AIDS/TB, Community Medicine, Malnutrition, a Reading Room, Nurses' Training, and Radio Sango Kitoko.

In 2001, the President of the Republic of Congo authorized the transformation of a former Communist youth camp into the country's first Christian hospital. After years of hard work, with lots of help from volunteers, partners, and local personnel, Hôpital Evangélique « Le Pionnier » opened in January 2006.

Today, because of God's faithfulness, the cabins of this former youth camp are now patient wards; the mess hall is now a well-equipped surgical suite; and the amphitheater once built to show propaganda films, is now a chapel where prayer services are held daily, and the Good News of Jesus Christ is freely proclaimed.

SHORT-TERM MISSIONARY SERVICE

Jesus Christ commands His disciples to "[Go and make disciples of all nations...](#)" It should be the exception if we stay. Often the first step in obeying this command is going on a short-term mission trip. Whether you are interested in coming for a few weeks or long-term, HELP wants to help make your experience a profitable one that will deepen your walk with Christ, advance the Kingdom of God, and confirm His calling on your life.

All volunteers seeking to serve at HELP should fill out the [Congo Candidate Questionnaire](#) and return it to the [Medical Director](#). Depending on your qualifications and the volunteer schedule when you are available to serve, you will receive further instructions. If appropriate, you will be encouraged to apply for short-term missionary service with one of the hospital's partner missions.

TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS

Currently the easiest way to get to Impfondo is to fly Delta/Air France, Ethiopian Airlines, Kenya Airways, Royal Air Maroc, to Brazzaville, capital of the Republic of Congo. Then after a night or two in Brazzaville, you will take another flight to Impfondo on a local airline. **Tickets for flights to/from Impfondo can only be bought locally, so HELP staff in Congo will arrange that for you.**

IMPORTANT: Before purchasing tickets, you need to check if your proposed travel dates are OK with our team in Congo. Once the [Medical Director](#) has received a copy of your passport and final itinerary, we will send you a letter of invitation which is needed to apply for your visa and clear immigration upon arrival.

HELP staff in Congo will arrange for someone to meet you at the airport in Brazzaville, guide you through immigration, baggage claim, customs, and take you to where you will be staying, until you catch a flight to Impfondo. They will also take care of your in-country lodging and flight reservations. Sometime before departure for Congo, US citizens are encouraged to register online with US State Department's [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program](#).

ACCOMODATIONS

While in Brazzaville you will stay at HELP's Bravo Ministry Center & Guest House. Bravo Guest House is a quiet, comfortable, and safe place to rest from long journeys. Some meals will be arranged for you, and an equipped kitchen is also available. There are many restaurants and small grocery stores in town.

In Impfondo, you will be staying on the hospital compound. All HELP housing has running water, solar electricity, screens, mosquito nets, and filtered drinking water. Sheets and towels are provided. A main meal will be prepared for you at midday. Breakfast and a light supper can be arranged, or you can take care of that on your own. You will enjoy a mixture of African and North American cuisine. You will eat well, but likely still lose weight!

Electricity supply is very limited, so HELP kindly asks you to **only use electric fans when the generator is running**, use lights only when you really need them, remember to switch them off when you don't, and unplug everything that you are not actively using (especially computers). Your strict conservation will help prevent power outages that may cut oxygen supply to a patient in respiratory distress, or shut down an incubator for a premature baby.

Laundry services will be arranged for you depending on your needs.

As you can imagine, in such a remote area, internet access is both limited, and expensive. Please perform updates, download files you will need, and turn off automatic updates on all the devices that you plan to bring before you come. Ask before sending or receiving full-size photos, videos, or large attachments while in Congo.

RAISING SUPPORT

HELP is a faith-based ministry. As representatives of the ministry in Congo, you will be expected to raise your own financial and prayer support, in faith, trusting God to provide. Very often your home church, and your own circle of family and friends will be happy to help with your expenses, if you let them know what you are doing and why. We encourage you to share from your heart in formal and informal presentations, prayer letters, and e-mail updates.

Perhaps you can afford to pay your own way completely. Even then, we encourage you to afford others the opportunity to participate in your ministry in a tangible way. "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Luke 12:34).

ESTIMATED COSTS

\$2,400.	Round-trip airfare from North America
300.	Round-trip airfare Brazzaville=Impfondo
550.	Food & Lodging (based on a one-month stay)
250.	Visa & Handling
500.	Administrative Fee
=====	
\$4,000.	Total estimated cost per person

Money for your flight to Impfondo, food & lodging expenses, and personal spending should be brought in fresh new US \$100 bills. Travelers' checks and credit cards are not very useful in Impfondo, but Visa® debit cards can sometimes be used at the ATM in town.

VISAS

In order to enter Republic of Congo, foreigners need to have to have a valid visa in their passport. Relax. If you follow these detailed step-by-step instructions, you shouldn't have any trouble. Here is how to do it:

1) Make sure you have a valid, signed, passport with at least 4 empty pages & 6 months of validity. Official application forms & instructions are available at your local post office and online at www.travel.state.gov.

2) Get a set of (4) identical passport-type photographs for each traveler (2 to send with your visa application, and 2 to bring with you to Congo).

3) Send your proposed travel plans (complete itinerary please) to the [Medical Director](#).

4) Once the proposed itinerary is approved, tickets can be purchased, and a copy of your final itinerary sent to the [Medical Director](#).

5) The Medical Director will then send you an official letter of invitation.

6) Obtain a copy of the visa application for each traveler from the [Visitor Info page](#).

7) Fill out the visa application form, making the following entries where requested:

Type of visa and period of stay: *ordinaire, entrées multiples, 3 mois*

Purpose of journey, in detail: *To serve as a volunteer at l'Hôpital Evangélique «Le Pionnier» à Impfondo.*

Place of entry & exit: *Brazzaville.*

Address during your stay in the country: *Hôpital Evangélique «Le Pionnier»,
Avenue Dennis Sassou Nguesso, BP 10, Impfondo.*

8) Once your tickets are issued & you have our letter of invitation, send your passport, two copies of the completed application, two identical photos, your letter of invitation, a printout of your travel itinerary, a money order for \$200 for each person in your party, and a self-addressed prepaid return envelope to (new address):

Embassy of the Republic of Congo
1720 16th St NW
Washington, DC 20009
(202) 726-0825

The embassy recommends that you have your passports sent and returned by [FedEx](#). If everything is in order, normal embassy processing time is 3 business days. You do not need to pay for a visa handling or expedited service, as long as you have 2 weeks left before departure. When your passport is returned, keep your yellow International Certificates of Vaccination booklet with it.

STAYING HEALTHY / MALARIA PREVENTION

"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." This advice has a good practical application to traveling, because if you follow it, you can travel lighter.

Please consider seriously and heed the following advice:

1) BUCKLE UP! Wear your seatbelt. Always. Every time. Use proper safety restraints for children. Exercise caution when driving, riding as a passenger, or as a pedestrian. The biggest threat to your life as you travel is from accidents. Every year more overseas travelers

die from motor vehicle accidents than any other cause. In Republic of Congo, substandard roadways and vehicles are the norm.

2) DON'T DRINK THE WATER! The tap water, that is. Even when there are no dangerous bugs in the water, your body will take some time to get used to a new set of friendly ones. Bottled water is usually safe, in original packaging. Once you reach the hospital in Impfondo, you can safely drink the filtered water we use. Even so, 1-2 days of loose bowel movements on arrival & your return can be expected. Traveler's diarrhea is the most common ailment of all travelers worldwide. You can help prevent it by eating only peeled or well-cooked foods, and avoiding ice or other drinks and treats made with unfiltered tap water. Feel free to bring your favorite diarrhea remedies and a roll of toilet paper or a packet of tissues in your carry-on. While traveling in Africa, if you find a working restroom, there usually is no toilet paper, soap, or towels. It is also a good idea to have a newer fluoroquinolone antibiotic (like ofloxacin) on hand in case you develop diarrhea with fever.

3) GET IMMUNIZED! (See the section below on vaccinations)

4) DON'T LET THE BED BUGS BITE! Malaria and filaria are very common problems here. You can avoid getting these illnesses by not being bit by the mosquitoes and biting flies that transmit them. With all diseases, primary prevention is best, so do your best to avoid being bit by mosquitoes & flies (wear repellent, long sleeves, sleep under permethrin-treated mosquito nets, try to be indoors at dusk & dawn, etc.). Sexual immorality is common in central Africa. As a result, sexually transmitted diseases are rampant. Don't place yourself at risk for temptation or assault. Do wear very conservative & modest clothing. Avoid physical or prolonged eye contact with strangers. Avoid public displays of affection. Be aware that your actions and words may be misinterpreted.

5) TAKE YOUR MEDICINE! All expatriate volunteers serving at HELP are required to take malaria prophylaxis. HELP recommends **Lariam (mefloquine) or doxycycline or Malarone (atovaquone and proguanil hydrochloride)**. These medications are the only methods that have proven effective in preventing malaria in our area. Mefloquine is taken as one 250 mg tablet per week and needs to be started one week before departure and continued for 4 weeks after your return. Doxycycline is taken 100 mg, once a day with supper while you are in the country, and for 4 weeks after your return. Malarone is also taken once a day, every day while you are in the country and for 1 week after your return. Fourth best would be 300 mg of chloroquine weekly AND 100 mg of paludrine daily (chloroquine alone is not adequate).

6) STAY OUT OF THE SUN! Impfondo is located 1.6 degrees north of the Equator, so the sun's rays hit hard all year long. It is hot in Impfondo. The average Caucasian will start to get sunburn here after just 20 minutes of exposure, so if you're melanin impaired, bring waterproof suntan lotion with a SPF of 20 or greater, and apply it liberally to all exposed areas whenever you will be outside for more than 15 minutes (even on cloudy days). Wear hats. Heat stroke and exhaustion can be avoided by drinking lots of water, staying in the shade, and taking frequent breaks to cool off.

TRAVEL IMMUNIZATIONS

The following vaccinations are recommended for Congo:

- 1) Yellow Fever. Documentation of vaccination or a letter of medical waiver is required for entry into Congo.
- 2) Hepatitis A. The vaccine is preferred if you can get more than one dose before coming. If you do not have enough time to get at least two doses of the vaccine, Hepatitis A Immune Globulin will protect you for several months.
- 3) Oral Typhoid Vaccine.
- 4) Hepatitis B (a series of 3 shots).
- 5) Injectable Polio booster (if you have not already had four doses of polio vaccine).
- 6) Make sure your routine Measles/Mumps/Rubella & Tetanus immunizations are up to date.
- 7) H1N1/Flu shot if you will be traveling between November and April.

The following vaccinations are optional:

- 1) Meningococcal Vaccine (more relevant during dry season, which is January-April).
- 2) Rabies Vaccine (not recommended).
- 3) Varicella Vaccine (if you have never had chicken pox or shingles).
- 4) It would be prudent to have a PPD test (for tuberculosis) done before & after your trip IF you plan to be involved in direct patient care.
- 5) Cholera vaccine is NOT recommended because it is not very effective, has many side effects, and the disease is easily prevented by not drinking contaminated water.
- 6) Smallpox vaccination may be a good idea for those involved in direct patient care, but it is available only in research centers.

All vaccinations and prophylactic medications should be recorded in your yellow International Certificates of Vaccination booklet, which you can obtain from your county health department, or wherever travel vaccines are administered. For more information on health issues and vaccines in Congo visit: nc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/congo.htm

PACKING TIPS

Around town or at the hospital, men should wear long trousers, button down or polo shirts, and shoes, sneakers, or sandals. During manual labor, and when off duty, t-shirts & jeans are acceptable. Shorts and tank tops are only acceptable inside HELP housing, or when exercising or participating in sports activities. Do not go around town in shorts or a tank top, as that will generate undue attention and misunderstanding of your intentions and character!

We prefer that women wear dresses or jumpers, skirts, or split skirts (below the knee) in public. Modest sleeveless tops are acceptable, but spaghetti straps, tight clothes, and halter tops are not appropriate. Loose-fitting pants and capris may be worn at home, or when riding bicycles. Do not wear tight fitting pants, shorts, or capris in public!

Medical personnel can wear scrubs while performing their clinical duties. Scrubs are not to be worn outside of the appropriate medical context.

In general, Congolese are sharp dressers, and take pride in their appearance. For both men & women, modesty & conservative styles are required. Loose fitting, light colored, breathable cotton or linen or dryfit® clothing is generally more comfortable than clothes made from other materials.

It is hot most of the time (87 degrees Fahrenheit), but it is still a good idea to bring a long sleeve shirt for protection against the sun and mosquitoes, and occasional cool evenings. Hats and sunglasses are helpful. A flashlight and headlight for getting around at night are indispensable. A raincoat, umbrella, and rain boots will come in handy, especially June-Nov. Bathing suits can be used in Brazzaville, but in Impfondo, women will need to wear shorts and a T-shirt over their suit when swimming in the river.

Photos are a great way to share your experience with those back home, but please keep in mind that cameras and memory cards may be confiscated, and heavy fines levied if people see you taking pictures at or near the airport or government buildings, in vehicles, or while riding a bike. Be careful never to point a camera at uniformed or plainclothes police & military personnel, or people that you do not know, without permission.

You will be asked to bring needed supplies & equipment, mail, and gifts from family and friends for members of our missionary team. Please joyfully consider that this is often the only practical way of getting essential items to Impfondo. Your help will be greatly appreciated. Those benefiting from your service are required to reimburse you for any associated excess luggage charges to Congo, and from Brazzaville to Impfondo, so please be prepared to let them know how much they owe when you give them the items you brought.

Health workers should bring a notarized copy of their professional license or diploma.

To get the most out of your luggage allowance, each piece of checked luggage should weigh as close to (but not over) 50 pounds as possible. In the US, airlines charge a set fee (\$100-250) per piece of excess or overweight luggage. Sometimes the airline may waive excess baggage fees if they know that you are on a humanitarian mission, and you are courteous & check in early. Some airlines offer a reduction on luggage fees if you check-in online and early.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Your first and most vital contact should be with Jesus Christ. Put Jesus first in your life. Let Him handle all your cares and concerns. "Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass" (Psalm 37:5).

Please note: Congo Time is 6 hours ahead of EST in the Fall-Winter and 5 hours ahead of EST in the Spring-Summer.

Hôpital Evangélique « Le Pionnier »

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Quartier Blanche Gomez

Brazzaville, Republic of Congo

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Guest Airtel Phone: 011 (242) 05-569-0647

Field Address :

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