



April 29, 2013

RE: ALTITUDE SICKNESS AT HEMKUND SAHIB (TRAVEL ADVISORY)

Summary: Altitude sickness is a disease that affects people who travel to high altitude. It can be fatal if left untreated.

Hemkund Sahib Facts & Figures

- Location: Uttarakhand, India
- Altitude: 4,330 m (14,206 ft)
- Sikh temple popular with pilgrims and avid hikers
- Visited by ~150,000 people per year
- Accessible from June-September



Altitude Sickness at Hemkund Sahib

Due to its location, people traveling to Hemkund Sahib are at risk of developing altitude sickness; a disease that can be fatal if left untreated. Recent studies by our research team found that almost one-third of pilgrims who travel to Hemkund Sahib develop altitude sickness. With 150,000 pilgrims visiting the temple each year that means almost **50,000 people per year** are at risk of developing of altitude sickness.

ATMA Research Summary: <http://athousandmetresabove.org/info/research/a-pilot-study-on-the-prevalence-of-acute-mountain-sickness-at-hemkund-sahib/>

What You Need to Know About Altitude Sickness

The symptoms of altitude sickness are:

- Headache
- Dizziness and/or lightheadedness
- Fatigue and/or weakness
- Difficulty sleeping
- Nausea, vomiting, or other gastrointestinal problems

If you have recently traveled to high altitude (greater than 2,500 m) and experience any or all of the above symptoms you may have altitude sickness. When you experience altitude sickness **stop ascending immediately**. If the symptoms persist or progress **descend to lower altitude**. Untreated altitude sickness can be fatal.



How to Prevent Altitude Sickness

The only way to treat altitude sickness is by descending to lower altitude. However, you can help prevent altitude sickness by following these basic rules.

- **Taking Acetazolomide (Diamox)** prophylactically (meaning, before you get the problem). Talk to a travel doctor.
- **Drink lots of water** before and during the hike.
- **Do not over-exert yourself.** Hike slowly. You don't get extra points for running to Hemkund Sahib.
- **Acclimatizing.** This means getting used to the low oxygen in increments. If possible, spend at least 1 night in Govindghat (the town at the end of the road and the start of the hike) and a minimum of 1-2 nights in Ghangharia (the midway town between Govindghat and Hemkund). If you can spare more time, spend a few extra nights in Ghangharia. Consider checking out the nearby Valley of Flowers, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, on one of your acclimatization days.
- **Be aware of the symptoms of altitude sickness.** Knowing the symptoms of altitude sickness and reacting accordingly could save your life.

Make no mistake, **altitude sickness is a serious condition** and if you do not descend to lower altitude when you experience symptoms of altitude sickness it could be **FATAL**. It is imperative that travellers to Hemkund Sahib are aware of the symptoms and what to do if they or others are affected.

Please share this article to raise awareness.

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