

Marshall Islands

Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI)

COMMUNICATION

Languages and Dialects

- The official languages of the Marshall Islands is Marshallese and English.
- English is the second language for most Marshallese.
- Micronesian languages are symbolic and define caste systems, clans, roles, knowledge and values. These languages hold and maintain historical stories and traditional knowledge (oratory culture).

Greetings

- When meeting people for the first time, Marshallese people smile or head bow respectfully.
- *lakwe* (pronounced "yokwey") is the Marshallese term used to greet and farewell others. This word also means love.
- It is appropriate to shake hands with someone if they offer their hand, irrespective of gender.
- People must be introduced prior to conversing. Social hierarchy should be observed when introducing others.
- Eye contact should be made when greeting. It is considered polite to remove sunglasses when speaking.

Names and titles

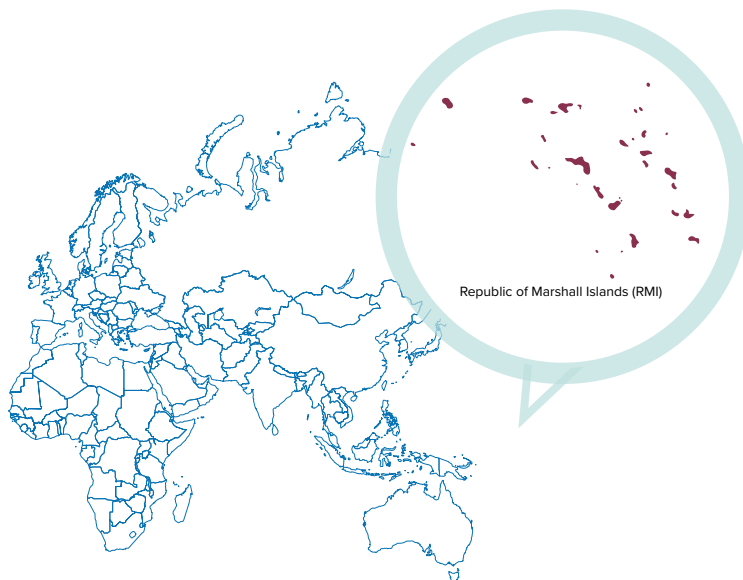
- Marshall Islands has a matrilineal society, land is passed down through the mother and land ownership defines social hierarchy through a caste system of chiefs and commoners. Clanship, family relations, cooperation and hospitality are important values.
- It is important to respect and use a person's correct title (e.g. religious, professional, community or diplomatic titles). It is acceptable to use a person's title and last name or title on its own.

Conversation

- Local etiquette emphasis harmonious and respectful interactions. Respect is given to tribal rank, religion, government, kinship, gender and age.
- Taboo conversation topics include death (from diseases, cancer, homicide and suicide), social violence (e.g. domestic and sexual assault) and gender related illness, investigations or treatments, particularly with more traditional or older individuals. It is important to establish trust and rapport before broaching these topics. These discussions might happen but in a private/secret conversation.
- It is not considered appropriate to discuss topics such as politics, religion, domestic violence or intimate relationships.
- Marshallese people are comfortable talking about their family, church and community in general conversation.

Non-Verbal Signals

- Respect for social rank is important and those of lower rank should bow their head and walk behind those of higher rank.
- Eye contact is preferred, but should not be maintained continuously when discussing sensitive topics.
- Females may hold hands as a sign of friendship.
- Public displays of affection between males and females are discouraged.



- To frown, wink or turn your back on a person who is speaking is considered rude in Marshallese culture.
- Permission must be obtained before touching a person (especially someone of royal blood, it is considered impolite for a commoner to touch a person with royal blood).
- Marshallese will often "wait around" to indicate that they wish to speak or see a health care worker.
- When responding to a question, a slight raising of the head or a smile can indicate agreement while silence can indicate disagreement or that the person doesn't understand the question.

CULTURAL NORMS

Patient and Provider Interaction

- The Pacific's definition of health is broad, collective, holistic, spiritual and linked to cultural identity.
- Religious beliefs play a major role in culture and health behavior.
- Extended family, friends, cultural group and faith leaders play a pivotal role in deciding when, where and from whom to seek help or treatment (traditional or western medicine).
- Dress is usually modest and casual (shirt and long trousers for men, dresses and skirts/covering below the knee and shoulders, for women).
- Usually a family member will accompany the person seeking health care.
- To maintain privacy and confidentiality within their community, individuals may prefer a family member of the same sex or similar age to translate for them.
- Community and family responsibilities and needs are prioritized and attended to before people consider seeking health care.
- The Micronesian approach to numeracy is one of *broad estimations for time, dates, weights, and numbers*. This needs to be considered when taking histories (e.g. length of symptoms, number of medications), arranging DOT and making appointments.
- Medical and nursing staff are respected as healers and people who can assist in solving problems.
- Outreach workers are seen by the community as people who can connect them to the health care system.
- DOT workers are trusted members of the villages who motivate community members to take and complete their TB treatment.
- Marshallese can feel stigmatised and not respected within western culture and health systems.

Visiting the home

- Home visits must be pre-arranged with the patient.
- When entering a home, remove shoes and hat/cap.
- Seating may be on chairs or mats. If seated on a mat, it is polite for men to sit cross-legged and for women to sit with their legs tucked beneath them. Women should not expose their thighs when seated.
- It is considered rude to stand above people, (especially men), who may be seated, to walk over them or stand in front of someone of higher rank.
- Drinks and food are commonly offered to visitors. It is considered impolite to refuse or waste food.
- Sharing food with visitors is important and a source of pride.
- You may be offered utensils to eat with, however, eating with your hands is acceptable.
- Prayers are normally said before meals.

TRADITIONAL IDEAS AND BELIEFS ABOUT TB

Common Causal Beliefs about TB

In Marshall Islands, it is thought by many in the community that TB may be attributed to one or more of the following causes:

- Genetics or inherited as a family disease;
- God's will, where individuals have no control over the outcome;
- Punishment for a breach of relationship, social or other cultural rules;
- Black magic or supernatural causes;
- Untreated physical injury (e.g. trauma to the chest);
- Bacteria.

Common Causal Beliefs about TB Transmission

In Marshall Islands, it is thought by some people that the transmission of TB may be attributed to:

- Sharing eating utensils, food, bedding or clothes with an infected person;
- Black magic or supernatural causes;
- Touching or contact with others;
- Taking previous TB preventive medication.

Stigma and TB

In Marshall Islands, stigma continues to be experienced by people with TB (also Leprosy and HIV). Stigma can be caused by beliefs based on past experiences, myths or misunderstanding. Stigma associated with TB can lead to the following:

- People have a fear of illness and death from TB and avoidance of seeking care.
- People may be shunned or isolated by their community if they are known to have TB or subjected to discrimination in the community, church, workplace or school.
- People may delay seeking health care or default from care and treatment as they don't want to be identified as a person with TB.
- People may be in denial about their diagnosis of TB through a distrust of a health care worker or system.

Common names, terms, phrases for TB and symptoms

Marshallese may refer to TB and symptoms using the following words or phrases:

English	Marshallese
TB	<i>TB</i>
MDR-TB	<i>MDR-TB</i>
LTBI-TB (sleeping TB)	<i>TB rejjab nañinmij ak kapopo</i>
Lung	<i>ār</i>
Cough	<i>pokpok</i>
Haemoptysis (cough blood)	<i>Pokpok bōtōktōk</i>
Fatigue	<i>komojno ak ajelkā</i>
Weight loss	<i>Mōōlok or aidriklok</i>
Night sweats	<i>menokadu in boñ</i>
Enlarged lymph nodes	<i>ebbōj</i>

TREATMENT CONSIDERATIONS

Non-allopathic Treatment for TB and Traditional Healers

- Marshallese commonly believe that medicines from local healers can cure all kinds of illness including TB.
- Traditional treatments are considered more natural as they are derived from plants or the environment and, are accessible and known within the community.
- Methods of healing may vary and include herbal remedies that are applied, ingested, inhaled, steamed or body massaged as well as dietary and/or travel restrictions (e.g. over the ocean by boats or traveling to certain islands or villages).
- Marshallese people believe that religious leaders can cure TB.
- Marshallese have stronger loyalty to traditional healing and medicine than to western healing and medicine.
- Traditional healers provide spiritual and emotional support which include sacredness and rituals (e.g. praying to heal the spirit and natural medicines to heal the body).
- The use of traditional medicine and treatments may not be disclosed to westerners as they may discourage its use.
- Traditional healers are well known and respected in the community. People commonly seek care from them before visiting hospitals or clinics.

Food and Dietary Restrictions

- Diets are generally high in fat, salt and sugar; low in fruits and vegetables. High amounts of canned fish and other tinned meats are consumed almost daily.
- Foods are preserved with salt, sugar and seasoning as refrigeration is often not available.
- Obesity and diabetes prevalence rates have risen due to Western lifestyle and diets.
- Fish is the main meal of the day, breadfruit (*bwiro* paste) pandanus, coconut banana and papaya are also eaten.
- Individuals commonly eat meals on their own or a small subgroup, consuming food from the "common pot."