

# Dominican Republic



## COMMUNICATION

### Languages and Dialects

- Official spoken language: Dominican Spanish
- People who have lived in major cities, or who have worked in areas frequented by tourists, may speak some English.

### Greetings

- Handshakes are an acceptable form of greeting; smile and make eye contact as you shake hands.
- People may also exchange kisses on the cheeks when they greet one another.
- Show deference to older family members upon meeting them.
- Dominicans will greet people anytime they enter a public space (including a bus or a taxi).
- People may say *saludos* ('Greetings'), *Buen día* ('Good morning'), *Buenas tardes* ('Good afternoon'), or *Buenas noches* ('Good evening') as part of a greeting.

### Names and Titles

- Address a Dominican person by an appropriate title and last name.
- If possible, use the Spanish version of a title: '*Señor*' ('Mister') for men, '*Señora*' ('Madam') for married women, and '*Señorita*' ('Miss') for single women.

### Conversation

- Dominicans stand close together while in conversation; moving away may be considered unfriendly.
- Dominicans speak very quickly: they 'swallow' syllables and drop the letter 's' at the end of words. Ask them to speak more slowly (*'más despacio por favor'*). Most people will be glad to accommodate you.
- Dominican Spanish is full of turns of phrase specific to people from that country – these may not translate well even to those who speak Spanish.
- Dominican people may employ endearments liberally in conversation: examples include *mi amor* ('my love') or *cariño* ('darling').
- Generally speaking, people from the Dominican Republic are uncomfortable with attempts to accelerate a decision-making process.

### Non-Verbal Signals

- Dominicans may 'point' by aiming their pursed lips in a particular direction.
- A Dominican person may 'scrunch up' their nose to indicate that they did not hear you.
- Dominican people may often say 'no' in gesture form, 'wagging' an index finger from side to side.

## CULTURAL NORMS

### Patient and Provider Interaction

- Dominican people do not adhere to standard concepts of time and punctuality. For example, '*ahorita*' ('now') could also refer to tomorrow or to an unspecified time in the future.
- To a Dominican person, maintaining eye contact indicates interest in what is being said. If you must look down at your notes during a conversation, mention your reason for looking away.
- Dominican patients expect a formal clothing style and careful grooming from their medical professionals.

### Behavior in Clinic

Respect is important to Dominican culture; Dominican people avoid doing anything to cause another person to 'lose face'.

- Dominican people prefer providers who spend a considerable amount of time with a patient; they prefer providers to listen carefully to the patient in clinic.
- Ask adult patients which family members they would like to include in discussions concerning care or decision making.
- Although the father may be the primary decision maker, the mother or grandmother may provide the majority of care to the diagnosed person.
- To avoid appearing rude, patients may indicate agreement even when they disagree or do not understand.
- Personal relationships are valued above being on time. Healthcare providers may want to discuss time schedules at the start of treatment.

### Visiting the Home

Family is an integral part of life in the Dominican Republic. Dominicans have a strong sense of personal obligation to family.

- Several generations may live within one household.
- People rarely spend free time alone or without family – instead, Dominican families gather in large groups to enjoy time off.
- Dominican people value hospitality and kindness, and will often welcome strangers into the family home.
- Dominicans believe in sharing what they have with those in need; they are generous hosts.
- If you are offered something you don't want, decline by saying a simple '*No, gracias*'.
- Mothers are considered to be the family's most important source of emotional support.

## Medication

- A range of medications, including antibiotics, can be purchased in the Dominican Republic without a prescription.
- Ill people may try self-treating prior to engaging medical care, so drug resistance should be considered.

## TRADITIONAL IDEAS AND BELIEFS

### Beliefs about the cause of illness

The following describes beliefs related to illness in general within the Dominican Republic.

Although some severe illnesses are not thought to have a spiritual cause, illness is sometimes thought to be related to spirits. Minor illnesses (like colds) are not considered to be caused by spirits.

- Illness caused by a bad spirit sent by an enemy is called *envoi*.
- A *bacha*, another spirit believed to cause illness, is a spirit that serves its owner to protect property. It can also be sent to another person to make that person sick.
- The 'evil eye' (*mal de ojo*) is believed to cause illness in babies or small children.
- Disease is also believed to be caused by 'dirty blood', or by a rapid change in temperature (from hot to cold).

Some people may believe that illness may be caused by a lack of attention to *misterioso* or *luases*, which are spirits that often appear in the form of saints.

### Beliefs about TB Transmission

Some Dominican people, including patients, may believe that TB could be transmitted in one or more of the following ways:

- Sharing eating utensils with an infected person;
- Sharing clothes or toilets with an infected person.

Some people may believe that burning or discarding the clothes of a person who has died of TB will help to prevent TB transmission.

## Traditional Remedies

The following describes treatments used by Dominicans to treat illnesses in general.

- While some traditional health practices and beliefs resemble Voodoo practices, traditional health practices in the Dominican Republic are different from Voodoo.
- You may offend a Dominican person if you ask them if they practice Voodoo.
- Illnesses that are not attributed to a spiritual cause are often treated with herbs.
- Illnesses or diseases thought to have a spiritual cause may be treated by healers.

Dominican people may consult one or more of the following types of traditional healers:

- *Espiritistas* (or *Brujos*), people believed to have spiritual powers that cure disease and control spirits;
- *Curanderos*, people who solve medical problems with herbs.

Treatment may include prayer and/or specific rituals designed to 'trap' a spirit thought to cause the disease.

*Resguardos* may also be used to prevent illness or to support treatment, and may include one or more of the following:

- Washing the patient's body with a mixture of chemical or herbal ingredients;
- Wearing amulets containing images of saints or 'magical weapons' such as the teeth of sharks or crocodiles;
- Writing pleas and magical formulas on a sheet of paper, burning the paper, then swallowing the ashes with sugar and water.

People may also consult Western doctors as they follow a plan that includes traditional remedies.