



National Centre for Polar & Ocean Research
Indian Scientific Expedition to Antarctica

Dear Participant,

Here, we bring you the experiences of one of our expedition member which might help you prepare better for the pre-Antarctic medical examination at All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi. The information provided in this advisory has been compiled by the author with utmost care. Nonetheless, National Centre for Polar & Ocean Research cannot assume liability for the topicality, accuracy, completeness or quality of the information provided. The organization and the author of this advisory cannot be held liable for material or non-material damage caused by incorrect or incomplete information, provided that the deficiencies in question are not deliberate or due to gross negligence.

Group Director (Antarctic Operations)

MEDICAL EXAMINATION AT ALL INDIA INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL SCIENCES (AIIMS), NEW DELHI

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Background

Visit to Antarctica entails being examined by a medical board which is specifically constituted for assessing your health status. This is a mandatory requirement for both summer members and winter members with only difference being the psychological assessment for wintering members. In case a member is declared unfit for any reason, he or she will not be able to visit the beautiful Antarctic continent.

The medical facilities available at Maitri and Bharati are primarily oriented for meeting any emergency situation that may arise here. It is necessary that all expedition members are physically and mentally fit to withstand the extreme weather and living conditions faced at Antarctica.

The thorough medical examination at AIIMS is primarily oriented to find out the chronic illness that may arise during the ensuing 12-18 months and actions may be taken to rectify them or optimize them as in case of chronic diseases such as hypertension, diabetes etc.

Members are required to report for pathological & radiological investigations at a designated laboratory in New Delhi, the details of which will be communicated separately with medical schedule. They are advised to report on the notified date and time with an empty stomach—without having breakfast, tea, coffee, or any food—with at least 12 hours of fasting prior to the examination.

Preparations

No special precautions are required for medical examination except for reporting empty stomach at Prithvi Bhavan (or any other place notified to you). One should however be aware of their fitness and it is recommended that in case you are suffering from any chronic disease then you should carry your medical history and investigations with you which are filed up in chronological order. All expedition members with past history of any hospital admissions and surgery shall also carry their relevant medical documents. Carrying your past medical history will help the doctors in assessing your present status which may reduce repetition of investigations being done again at AIIMS.

Also it is recommended though not mandatory to visit your primary care physician telling him that you are going to be assessed medically for your Antarctica visit so that he can primarily assess you and also evaluate you prior to your medical examination to advise you of any medications and investigations that he thinks that you should undergo. This will lead to optimization of your health and lifestyle changes so that your stay at Delhi can be minimized during medical examination. Remember that the medical examination takes place as a group at AIIMS and if you are asked to investigate further for any health condition then that will be done by you only which will involve a lot of running around later on. AIIMS is a busy centre and you will certainly realise later on that clearing medical with your group would have been a lot easier as compared to your running around alone through corridors of AIIMS.

Medical Examination

At the assembly point, the group leader will brief you about the plan for first day which will primarily be getting all investigations done. He will be having the time schedule for next 3-4 days and most departments in AIIMS will be aware of your medical examination.

Day-1 will start with your going to lab and getting your blood and urine samples being taken empty stomach and also after some meals (or glucose) at investigation centre authorized by AIIMS. Thereafter everyone will proceed for their X-rays (OPG and chest X-ray) and ultrasound examination of abdomen and pelvis. Female members are advised to drink a lot of water prior to their USG of Abdomen and Pelvis as USG Pelvis for females needs the urinary bladder to be full for proper assessment. The third stop is going to be for conduct of ECG examination at an authorized centre. Once these three checkpoints are over, your work outside is done. This should usually be completed on day-1.

Ophthalmology and dental examinations, depending upon availability of doctors at AIIMS, could be carried out in the second half of day-1 or on day -2. Group leader will collect all blood and urine investigation reports and also be custodian of your ECG, x-rays and USG reports.

For the rest of the medical days, assembly point would be decided by the group leader. Sequence of further examinations is usually variable at AIIMS. In addition to ophthalmology and dental

examinations, you will be examined at department of general surgery and department of medicine at AIIMS. Lady expedition members in addition will also undergo gynecologic checkup. All members have to reach a destined location for the examination where they will be examined by deputed surgeon and physician by medical board at AIIMS. The wintering team members also have to undergo a psychological assessment which includes a written test followed by interview by a clinical psychologist. If everything goes well then the medical examination should be over by the end of second day. The group leader will ensure that all investigations of his group are submitted to Medical board for their perusal and opinion regarding suitability of candidate for visiting Antarctica.

All the medical examinations are typically completed by the end of day-3, however there could be delay on one account or other forcing the need for fourth day for completion of exams. Since the examination is to be conducted as a group it takes less time once it is started however the main problem is to get the time slot due to AIIMS being a busy centre.

While undergoing medical examination at AIIMS all members must follow the instructions of their group leader and follow it sincerely. Please do not try to club any other task with medical examination as the examination will be done as per the availability of doctors at AIIMS. If you were absent from the group during examination then the onus of getting it done lies on you only. Therefore, it is required that members be there as a group for that entire duration.

Completion of Medical Examination

Once all formalities are over, the group leader will brief everyone for further plans and place and time of assembling for departure for Auli. The reports of medical examination will be intimated to all members while they are nearing their completion of Auli training. Some members will be declared temporarily unfit with need for further evaluation and thus they have to report back to AIIMS accordingly. It will be better for members to complete their formalities immediately after Auli training otherwise one will have to come back again for getting the clearance from medical board. Remember that in absence of a green signal from medical board, Antarctica visit is not possible.

Medical examination at AIIMS is done to evaluate an individual regarding his/her suitability to visit Antarctica. A thorough evaluation is in interest of both, the individual as well as the team. It is your first step towards your journey to Antarctica and should be taken with utmost sincerity.

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N.B. The duration of the medical and pre-Antarctic training is likely to change as per availability of the Medical Board and training instructors. Communications from NCPOR/Medical Batch Coordinator shall prevail.