



Why Everest climbers need more than a doctor's note

Nepal wants mountaineers to have a medical report, but its demand for rescue insurance is set to make the biggest impact, writes Matt Napiltonia

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Mount Everest climbers may need a doctor's note before attempting to scale the highest peak on Earth. There are two standard routes to the top of Mt Everest. One follows the north ridge starting from Tibet in China. The other traverses the southeast ridge beginning in Nepal. Nepalese officials set the rules for who can, and cannot, climb the vastly more popular southeast ridge to Mt Everest.

The latest set of proposed policies include requirements for climbers to submit a full personal medical history and a medical report from a certified doctor.

The proposed rule changes are in response to the numerous deaths that occurred on the 29,029-foot-high peak during the 2019 climbing season that partly were attributed to mountaineers' health conditions. According to Mira Acharya, director at Nepal's Department of Tourism, the organisation in charge of distributing permits to climbers, "... most deaths occurred due to fitness and health issues. We have come up with these strict measures."

There were 11 deaths on Mt Everest in 2019, twice the number from the previous year. However, none of the people who died had any reported cautionary medical concerns. The climbers were experienced, and most had successfully summited the mountain before they died.

It remains unclear among experts whether climbing prerequisites like doctor's notes and the submission of medical histories would make a difference in the number of fatalities or climber well-being. "All of these proposals will not make climbing Everest any safer," said



'IN 2019 THERE WERE 11 DEATHS ON EVEREST'

Alan Arnette, a mountaineer who reached the Everest peak in 2011 and was cited by Outside Magazine as one of the world's most respected chroniclers of Everest.

The Department of Tourism also recommended specific, mandatory insurance coverage including rescue and

medical aid. Acharya said the provision "will allow rescues and prompt treatment if the mountaineer is ill or stuck at high altitude".

Government regulations already require insurance for climbing guides and high-altitude workers, but not climbers. According to Nepalese officials, the insurance coverage mandate was made in response to incidents where climbers were discovered on high-altitude mountains with only a life insurance policy. Climbers who need medical assistance or evacuation can incur expenses well into the tens of thousands of dollars or more. Arnette said that veteran, highly regarded guides already have medical and evacuation insurance requirements for mountaineers joining their expeditions.

The new rules have been submitted for ratification, but no timeline has been set for a decision. Matt Napiltonia is a Senior Manager in Global Rescue's US-based Operations Center. He was a Platoon Leader and Medical Services Officer in the 101st Airborne Division, and a US Navy SEAL.

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