

HEALTH PROTECTION DURING TRAVELS – GENERAL INFORMATION FOR TRAVELLERS

Travelling exposes us to many health risks. We are exposed to many infectious diseases and problems related to poor hygiene conditions, poor drinking water supply, poor transport safety, and different climatic and social conditions. Travellers also often encounter less developed and less accessible health services. Protecting our health while travelling is therefore all the more important and depends mainly on our behaviour and on taking basic preventive measures.

The most common travel problems are traveller's diarrhoea, upper respiratory infections, skin infections, sexually transmitted diseases, mosquito and other insect-borne diseases, animal bites and stings, injuries, altitude sickness, travel sickness, jet lag, sunburn and many others.

Traveller's diarrhoea is the most common health problem experienced by travellers, either during the trip itself or shortly after returning home. The disease is caused by infection with various microorganisms or poisoning by their metabolites. Infection can be acquired through food and drink, or by the transfer of pathogens into the body through contaminated hands. Diarrhoea is usually mild and will pass on its own within a few days, but if it is accompanied by fever or blood in the stool, medical attention is needed. Travel diarrhoea can be particularly dangerous for babies and young children, pregnant women, the elderly and those with weakened immune systems, as it can lead to dangerous dehydration or starvation. In case of traveller's diarrhoea, make sure you replace lost fluids and electrolytes. The best way to do this is to use ready-made rehydration powders and solutions, but you can also make your own oral rehydration fluid. Add 4 teaspoons of sugar and half a teaspoon of salt to one litre of boiled water and add the juice of one orange. In severe cases, medicines that reduce/stop bowel movements and certain antibiotics can also be used to treat traveller's diarrhoea.

The risk of traveller's diarrhoea can be reduced by taking general hygiene precautions and choosing food and drinks carefully. The safest way to eat is freshly prepared and well-cooked food. It is also safe to eat dry foods (crackers, bread) and fruit that can be peeled with a clean knife and clean hands. Follow the rule: "Cook, bake, peel or don't eat!". A major risk comes from uncooked foods, such as desserts, sauces, dressings, cold cuts, salads, raw vegetables, egg dishes, ice cream and seafood. Milk and dairy products are also high-risk foods. When travelling to places where we cannot rely on safe drinking water from the tap, we always drink bottled water and bottled drinks. Coffee and tea are also safe as they are made from boiled water. If you boil water, it should be boiled for at least 1 minute, and at higher altitudes for at least 3 minutes. Avoid drinking drinks with ice, which can be made from contaminated water, or fruit juices diluted with water.

Good hand hygiene is extremely important. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water as often as possible, especially before eating and after using the toilet. If clean water is not available, use wet wipes or alcohol wipes.

Another common travel-related problem is motion sickness, which is caused by a mismatch between actual and perceived body movement. Nausea is accompanied by facial pallor, cold sweat and may be accompanied by vomiting. By reducing head movement and limiting visual stimuli, we can try to prevent or eliminate the problem (eyes closed, gaze fixed on the horizon). Problems can also be prevented by taking anti-motion sickness medication. This should be taken 1 hour before travelling.

Diseases transmitted by mosquitoes and other insects are numerous and common. Travellers can contract malaria, dengue, yellow fever, Japanese encephalitis, chikungunya and other vector-borne diseases.

Different insects are active at different times of day, but most are active in the morning and evening. Some vector-borne diseases can be prevented by vaccination (yellow fever, Japanese encephalitis) or medication (malaria), but it is always important to protect yourself from insect bites. We protect ourselves by wearing clothing that covers most of our skin, by using insecticides to kill insects indoors, using protective nets to prevent insects from entering our homes, sleeping under mosquito nets and, most importantly, using repellents. Repellents should be applied to exposed skin and can also be applied to clothing and reapplied every few hours. Take care not to get it into your mouth, eyes or on wounds. Repellents are safe to use on pregnant women and young children. We recommend using repellents containing 30–50% DEET or 20% picaridin.

Some tropical diseases are transmitted to humans through stagnant water, so swimming in lakes and slow-moving rivers is not recommended in endemic areas. Flip-flops are recommended for walking on sandy beaches.

To reduce the risk of injuries and traffic accidents, avoid driving at night and wear seatbelts and crash helmets. Take special care to use swimming pools safely and to avoid the dangers of swimming in the sea due to the currents and waves.

Last but not least, it is important to take adequate precautions against sexually transmitted diseases when travelling.

Remember to wear adequate sunscreen with a high sun protection factor (SPF 30 and above) and make sure you drink enough fluids every day (at least 2 litres of water a day; 1 litre more if the outside temperature rises by 10°C).

When animals (dogs, cats, monkeys, bats and other animals) bite you, you are at risk of contracting life-threatening rabies. The risk exists in most parts of the world except Australia, New Zealand, Greenland and northern Canada, and much of western Europe- if bitten, the wound should be washed immediately with soapy water, then rinsed under clean running water, covered with sterile gauze and bandaged. It is essential to seek medical advice as soon as possible during the trip to decide whether you need to be protected by a series of vaccination, which usually need to be continued at home. A visit to an anti-rabies clinic is recommended upon return. Preventive vaccination is recommended for travellers who, because of the nature of their trip, have a higher risk of contracting rabies.

You can find out more about the risks of travelling, specific illnesses and preventive measures on the Preventive Medicine Society's website "Healthy on the Road and Back".

<http://www.zdravinapot.si>

TRAVEL PHARMACY

A travel pharmacy is a compulsory part of every traveller's luggage. The contents of this pharmacy must be tailored to the individual's personal needs and state of health. It is also compulsory to take out additional health insurance when travelling abroad!

Basic contents:

- Rehydration powder to make a rehydration solution (to replace lost minerals and prevent dehydration in case of diarrhoea or vomiting);
- Probiotic tablets or capsules to relieve diarrhoea;
- Constipation remedies;
- Fever and pain tablets (acetylsalicylic acid-based products are not recommended in areas where haemorrhagic fever infection is possible);
- A body thermometer;
- Plasters, bandages, gauze, sterile wound dressing, elastic bandage, scissors;
- Disinfectant (alcohol or disinfectant wipes);
- Repellents and insect bite repellents;
- Sunscreen and other sun protection products.

The **additional** content must be tailored to the individual, the destination and the mode of travel, so it is up to each person to design it according to their own needs:

- Medicines prescribed by your personal doctor and taken regularly;
- Antimalarial tablets if the area is malarial;
- Tablets for motion sickness;
- Allergy medication (antihistamines) for those with allergies;
- Water conditioner or safe drinking water (kettle, water purification tablets, etc.) if safe bottled water is not available.

What should we be aware of when taking prescribed medicines?

Check with your doctor first to make sure you are fit to travel. If you are taking medication that needs to be declared to customs at your destination, or if you are diabetic and carry needles and syringes, ask your doctor for written confirmation (in the international language), otherwise there may be unpleasant complications.

Where should we store the medicines we take with us on our trip?

Keep your medicines in one place, preferably in a heat-insulated bag and out of reach of children. Be aware of special transport conditions at airports or border crossings. Check the expiry date of medicines before preparing your medicine bag. Medicines should be kept in their original packaging together with the instructions for use. If possible, they should be stored at a temperature no higher than room temperature (25°C). Care should also be taken when storing medicines that require special storage conditions. They should be protected from light and moisture.