

## **TRAVEL HEALTH ADVICE**

The following information will help you stay healthy on your trip.  
Please make sure you read it in advance of your travels abroad.

### **WATER**

Diseases can be caught from drinking contaminated water or swimming in it. Unless you know the water supply is safe where you are staying **ONLY USE:**

1. Boiling water
2. Bottled water or canned drinks
3. Water treated by a sterilising agent

Includes water used to make ice cubes in drinks and water for cleaning your teeth.

### **SWIMMING**

It is safer to swim in water that is chlorinated. If you are travelling to Africa, South America or some parts of the Caribbean, avoid swimming in freshwater lakes and streams. You can catch a parasitic disease called schistosomiasis from such places. This disease is also known as Bilharzia. It is also wise never to go barefoot, but to wear protective footwear when out, even on the beach. Other diseases can be caught from sand and soil, particularly wet soil.

### **FOOD**

Contaminated food is the most common source of many diseases abroad. You can help prevent it by following these guidelines:

- Only eat well-cooked fresh food
- Avoid leftovers and reheated food
- Ensure meat is thoroughly cooked
- Eat cooked vegetables, avoid salads
- Only eat fruit you can peel
- Never drink unpasteurised milk
- Avoid ice-cream
- Shellfish is a high-risk food
- Avoid buying food from street vendor's stalls as a general rule

If you drink excess alcohol could lead you to become carefree and ignore these precautions.

### **PERSONAL HYGIENE**

Many diseases are transmitted by what is known as the 'faecal-oral' route. To help prevent this, always wash your hands with soap and clean water after going to the toilet, before eating and before handling food. Using hand gel is another sensible option.

## TRAVELLERS' DIARRHOEA

This is the most common illness that you will be exposed to abroad and there is NO vaccine against it. Diarrhoea is caused by eating and/or drinking food and water contaminated by bacteria, viruses or parasites. The risk of illness is higher in some countries than in others.

**High-risk areas** include North Africa, Sub Saharan Africa, the Indian Subcontinent, South East Asia, South America, Mexico and the Middle East.

**Medium-risk areas** include the Northern Mediterranean, Canary Islands and the Caribbean Islands.

**Low-risk areas** include North America, Western Europe and America

You can certainly help prevent traveller's diarrhoea in the way you behave - make sure you follow the food, water and personal hygiene guidelines already given.

### What is traveller's diarrhoea?

Traveller's diarrhoea is 3 or more loose stools in a 24hr period often accompanied by stomach pain, cramps and vomiting. It usually lasts 2-4 days and whilst it is not a life-threatening illness, it can disrupt your trip for several days. The main danger of the illness is dehydration, and this, if very severe, can kill if it is not treated. Treatment is therefore rehydration. In severe cases and particularly in young children and the elderly, a commercially prepared rehydration solution is extremely useful.

### Travel well prepared

A good tip is to take oral rehydration solutions with you. These can be bought over the counter in a pharmacy, available in tablet or sachet form e.g. Dioralyte, Electrolade or Dioralyte Relief.

Anti-diarrhoeal tablets can be used for adults but should NEVER BE USED in children under 4 years of age and only on prescription for children aged 4 to 12 years. Commonly used tablets are Imodium, Lomotil or Normaloe. **None of these tablets should be used if the person has a temperature or blood in the stool.**

Do contact medical help if the affected person has:-

- A high temperature
- Blood in the diarrhoea
- Diarrhoea for more than 48 hours (or 24 hours in children)
- Becomes confused

In some circumstances, antibiotics are used as a standby treatment for travellers' diarrhoea. Such medication is not usually available on the NHS in anticipation of you being ill when away and needs to be prescribed. A woman taking the oral contraceptive pill may not have full contraceptive protection if she has had diarrhoea and vomiting. Extra precaution must be used - refer to your 'pill' information leaflet. If using condoms, take a supply of good quality ones with you which are CE approved.

## HEPATITIS B & HIV

These diseases can be transmitted by:

- Blood transfusion
- Medical procedures with non-sterile equipment
- Sharing of needles
- Sexual contact - sexually transmitted infections or STI's are also transmitted this way

### **Ways to protect yourself:**

- Only accept a blood transfusion when essential
- If travelling to a resource-poor, take a sterile medical kit
- Avoid procedures e.g. ear and body piercing, tattooing & acupuncture
- Avoid casual sex, especially without using condoms

**Remember:** excessive alcohol can make you carefree and lead you to take risks you otherwise would not consider.

## INSECT BITES

Mosquitos, certain types of flies, ticks and bugs can cause many different diseases e.g. malaria, dengue fever, and yellow fever. Some bite at night but some during daytime hours so protection is needed at all times.

### **Avoid being bitten by:**

- Cover up the skin as much as possible if going out at night, (mosquitos that transmit malaria through bites from dusk until dawn). Wear loose-fitting clothes, long sleeves trousers or long skirts.
- Use insect repellents on exposed skin. (DEET-containing products are the most effective. A content of up to 50% DEET is recommended for tropical destinations). Clothes can be sprayed with repellents too or clothing-specific sprays, e.g. permethrin. Always check the suitability for children on the individual products. If using sunscreen always apply the sunscreen first and then follow up with insect repellent.
- If your room is not air-conditioned, but screened, close the shutters early evening and spray the room with knockdown insecticide spray. In malarious regions, if camping, or sleeping in unprotected accommodation, always sleep under a mosquito net (impregnated with permethrin). Avoid camping near areas of stagnant water, these are common breeding grounds for mosquitoes.
- Electric insecticide vaporisers are very effective as long as there are no power failures.
- There is no scientific evidence that electric buzzers, savoury yeast extract, tea tree oil, bath oils, garlic and vitamin B are effective.
- Homoeopathic and herbal medications should NEVER be used as an alternative to conventional measures for malaria prevention.

## **MALARIA**

Malaria is a disease spread by mosquitos, there are no vaccines available to prevent malaria. If you are travelling to a malarious country, the travel advisor will have given you a separate leaflet with more details, please read it. Remember malaria is a serious and sometimes fatal disease. If you develop flu-like symptoms, including fever, sweats, chills, feeling unwell, headaches, muscle pains, cough, diarrhoea - then seek medical help immediately for advice and say you've been abroad. This is VITAL, don't delay.

### **Remember the ABCD of malaria prevention advice:**

- A - Awareness of the risk
- B - Bite prevention
- C - Chemoprophylaxis (taking the correct tablets)
- D - Diagnosis (knowing the symptoms and acting quickly)

## **ANIMAL BITES**

Rabies is present in many parts of the world. If a person develops rabies, death is 100% certain.

### **The 3 Rules of Rabies:**

1. Do not touch any animal, even dogs and cats
2. If you are licked on broken skin, scratched or bitten by an animal in a country which has rabies, wash the wound thoroughly with soap and running water for 10 - 15 minutes, then apply an antiseptic solution if possible e.g. iodine or alcohol. Such precautions also apply if you are licked by the animal with their saliva coming into contact with your eyes or inside your mouth (essentially any mucous membranes)
3. Seek medical advice IMMEDIATELY, even if you have been previously immunised, this is absolutely essential.

## **ACCIDENTS**

Major leading causes of death in travellers abroad are due to accidents, predominantly road traffic accidents and swimming/water accidents. You can help prevent them by following sensible precautions.

### **Precautionary Guidelines**

- Avoid alcohol and food before swimming
- Never dive into water where the depth is uncertain
- Only swim in safe water, check currents, sharks, jellyfish etc.
- Avoid alcohol when driving, especially at night
- Avoid hiring motorcycles and mopeds

- If hiring a car, rent a large one if possible, and ensure the tyres, brakes and seat belts are in good condition
- Use reliable taxi firms, know where emergency facilities are available

## **PERSONAL SAFETY AND SECURITY**

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) provide excellent information about this. They have information for many different types of travel and also advise on travel to specific destinations in times of political unrest and natural disasters. Please visit their website for more information: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-office>

## **INSURANCE COVER**

- Take out adequate insurance cover for your trip. This should possibly include medical repatriation as, without it, this service is extremely expensive if needed.
- If you have any pre-existing medical conditions, make sure you inform the insurance company of these details and check the small print of the policy thoroughly.
- If you travel to a European country, make sure you have obtained an EHIC card before you travel which can take time to obtain. Further information about the EHIC card can be found at <https://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/healthcareabroad/ehic/pages/applyingandrenewing.asp>  
[X](#)
- Please note; additional travel insurance is still advised even if you have an EHIC Card.

## **AIR TRAVEL**

It is sensible on any long-haul flight to be comfortable in your seat. Exercise your legs, feet and toes while sitting every half an hour or so and take short walks whenever feasible. Upper body and breathing exercises can further improve circulation. Drink plenty of water and be sensible about alcohol intake which in excess leads to dehydration. Further information can be obtained from the websites detailed at the end of this leaflet with more specific information and advice on travel-related deep vein thrombosis.

## **SUN AND HEAT**

Sunburn and heat stroke can cause serious problems in travellers but in long term can be a serious cause of skin cancer. There is no such thing as a safe suntan, but the following advice should be taken:

### **Precautionary guidelines:**

- Increase sun exposure gradually, with a 20-minute limit initially
- Use sun blocks that contain both UVA and UVB protection and sufficient sun protection factor (SPF) and a minimum of SPF15. Children under 3 years of age should have a minimum of SPF 25 and babies under 6 months should be kept out of the sun at all

times. Reapply often and always after swimming or showering. Please ensure you read manufacturer instructions.

- Always apply sunscreen first, followed by an insect repellent spray on top
- Wear protective clothing - sunhats, T-shirts and sunglasses are recommended
- Avoid going out between 11am and 3pm, when the sun's rays are strongest
- Take special care of children and those with pale skin/red hair
- Drink extra fluids in a hot climate - be aware alcohol can make you dehydrated

**Have a good, but safe and healthy trip!**