

NEW FOREST CENTRAL MEDICAL GROUP

Travel Health Advice Leaflet

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:**

- Boiled water
- Bottled water or canned drinks
- Water treated by a sterilising agent

This 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 well chlorinated. If you are travelling to Africa, South America or some parts of the Caribbean, avoid swimming in fresh water 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 illness abroad. You can help prevent falling ill by following these guidelines:

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

Alcohol – drinking in excess can lead you to become carefree and ignore these precautions.

Remember

**Cook it, peel it, or leave
it!**

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 and before eating/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 consuming food or water contaminated by bacteria, viruses or parasites. Risk of illness is higher in some countries than others.

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

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

Low risk areas include North America, Western Europe and Australia

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

What is travellers' diarrhoea?

Travellers' diarrhoea is 3 or more loose stools in a 24 hour period, often accompanied by stomach pain, cramps and vomiting. It usually lasts 2-4 days and whilst it is not 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 not treated. Treatment is rehydration. In severe cases and particularly in young children and the elderly, 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 at a pharmacy, available in tablet or powdered form.

For example:

- **Dioralyte**
- **Electrolade**
- **Dioralyte Relief** (formula containing rice powder which helps relieve the diarrhoea, particularly useful in children)

Take care regarding their use in very small children and seek medical advice where necessary.

Anti diarrhoeal tablets can be used in adults, but should **never be used in children under the age of 4**, 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 temperature
- Blood in the diarrhoea
- Diarrhoea for more than 48hrs (or 24hrs 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 oral contraceptives may not have full contraceptive protection if she has had diarrhoea and vomiting, so extra precautions should be used. Refer to the pill information leaflet. If using condoms, taken a supply of good quality ones with you which are CE approved.

Hepatitis B and HIV Infection

These diseases can be transmitted by:

- Blood transfusion
- Medical procedures with non sterile equipment
- Sharing of needles (e.g. tattooing, body piercing, acupuncture, drug abuse)
- Sexual contact – sexually transmitted infections are also transmitted this way

Ways to protect yourself:

- Only accept a blood transfusion when essential
- If travelling to a resource poor country, take a sterile medical kit
- Avoid procedures e.g. ear and body piercing, tattooing and 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

Mosquitoes, certain types of fly, ticks and bugs can cause many different diseases. For example malaria, dengue fever and yellow fever. Some bite at night, but some during the day so protection is needed at all times.

You can avoid being bitten by:

- Covering up skin as much as possible if going out at night (mosquitoes that transmit malaria bite 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; content of up to 50% DEET is recommended for tropical destinations. Clothes can be sprayed with repellents too, or use clothing specific sprays such as permethrin. Check suitability for children on individual products. If using sunscreen always apply that first, followed by and insect repellent on top.
- If your room is not air conditioned, but is screened, close shutters in early evening and spray room with knockdown insecticide spray. In malaria risk regions, if camping or sleeping in unprotected accommodation, always sleep under a mosquito net (impregnated with permethrin). Avoid camping near areas of stagnant water as these are common breeding areas for mosquitoes etc.
- 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 or vitamin B** are effective.

Homeopathic and herbal medications should **NEVER** be used as an alternative to conventional measures for malaria prevention.

Malaria

Malaria is a disease spread by mosquitoes. There is no vaccine available. If you are travelling to a country that has malaria risk, the travel adviser will have given you a separate leaflet with more details – please remember to read it. Malaria is a serious and sometimes fatal disease. If you develop **flu like symptoms** including fever, sweats, chills, feeling unwell, headache, muscle pain, cough, diarrhoea then **seek medical help immediately** – remember to tell them you have been abroad. This is vital – **do not delay**.

Remember to ABCD of malaria prevention:

Awareness of the risk

Bite prevention

Chemoprophylaxis (taking the correct tablets)

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.

There are 3 rules regarding rabies

- Do not touch any animal, even dogs and cats
- 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)
- Seek medical advice immediately, even if you have previously been immunised. This is absolutely essential.

Accidents

Major leading cause of death in travellers abroad is accidents, predominately road traffic accidents and swimming/water accidents.

You can help prevent them by following sensible precautions:

- Avoid alcohol and food before swimming
- Never dive into water where the depth is uncertain
- Only swim in safe water, check for currents and dangerous marine life (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. Ensure tyres, brakes and seat belts are in good condition
- Use reliable taxi firms, know where emergency facilities are

Personal safety and security

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) provide excellent information about this including a very useful service called LOCATE which enables you to register details of your trips abroad. They have information for many different types of travel and they also advise on travel to specific destinations in times of political unrest and natural disasters. Please visit their website for more detail – www.fco.gov.uk

Insurance cover

Take out adequate insurance for your trip. This should possibly include medical repatriation as without it, this service is extremely expensive without it.

If you have 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 Union country make sure you have obtained an EHC card before you travel. These can take some time to obtain. Please visit

www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcareabroad/EHC/Pages/Applyingandrenewing.aspx

Please note that additional travel insurance is still advised, even if you have an EHC 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 websites detailed at the end of this leaflet, which give more specific advice and information on travel related deep vein thrombosis.

Sun and heat

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

- Increase sun exposure gradually, with a 20 minute limit initially
- Use sun blocks which contain both UVA and UVB protection, with sufficient sun protection factor (SPF), the minimum being SPF 15. Children under 3 years 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 and washing. Read manufacturer instructions.
- Always apply sunscreen first followed by insect repellent spray on top
- Wear protective clothing – sunhats, t-shirts and sunglasses etc.
- 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 that alcohol can make you dehydrated

Have a good, but safe and healthy trip

Further travel advice and information can be found on the following websites

Name/description	Web address
Fit for travel – Scottish nhs public travel site for general advice on all aspects of travel and country specific information, including malarial maps	www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk
NaTHNaC – National Travel Health Network and Centre. Based in England, similar information to above	www.nathnac.org
NHS Choices – look at travel health in the the 'A-Z' section. Also travel health in the 'live well' section	www.nhs.uk
FCO – Foreign & Commonwealth Office. Especially useful for safety and security, types of travel (gap years, responsible tourism). Also check 'Our Publications' and 'LOCATE' service	www.fco.gov.uk/travel/
Malaria Hotspots – general info for travellers regarding malaria. Helpful podcast in the 'malaria travel tips' section	www.malariahotspots.co.uk
Sunsmart – cancer research website, provides info on skin cancer and sun protection advice	www.cancerresearchuk.org/SunSmart/
Travel health products – selection of resources available. Please note the practice is not endorsing such items, merely providing information.	www.lifesystems.co.uk www.nomadtravel.co.uk www.safariquip.co.uk www.travelpharm.com

Name/description	Web address
Medex – advice booklet about travelling at high altitude	www.medex.org.uk
Medic Alert – life saving identification system for people with hidden medical conditions and allergies	www.medicalert.org.uk
Kids Travel Doc – a paediatrician’s guide to travel and outdoor recreational activities	www.kidstraveldoc.com
Diabetes UK – information specific to people with diabetes who wish to travel	www.diabetes.org.uk
Global travel clinic locator from the International Society of Travel Medicine	www.istm.org
IAMAT – International Association for Medical Assistance to Travellers (IAMAT)	www.iamat.org/doctors_clinics.cfm
Google translate – Free online translation service	http://translate.google.com