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## Overseas travel – health tips

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### Summary

- Overseas travellers have a 50 per cent chance of suffering from a travel-related illness.
  - The most common travel-related sickness is gastrointestinal infection, which is generally picked up from poorly prepared food and untreated water.
  - Have a medical check-up to make sure you are healthy before you travel and discuss vaccinations with your doctor.
  - Be prepared and aware of health issues when travelling.
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People who travel overseas have up to a 50 per cent chance of suffering a travel-related illness. While most travel-related illness is minor, some very serious infectious diseases are endemic in some parts of the world. All travellers should be prepared for travel and be aware of health issues and measures to protect themselves from sickness.

### Prepare for travel

There are many things you can do to prepare for a healthy holiday, including:

- Have a medical check-up. Make sure you are healthy before you travel.
- Update your vaccinations and ask about other immunisations.
- Pack a medical kit for yourself and any children travelling with you. Make sure you pack enough of any medications you need, or take a prescription.
- Organise travel insurance, including cover if you need to be evacuated to a suitable hospital.
- Have a dental check-up.
- Have a vision check and pack a spare pair of glasses.

### Travel vaccinations

You may want to arrange vaccinations or medications to protect against diseases such as hepatitis, typhoid or malaria. In fact, some countries legally require travellers to have certain vaccinations, such as yellow fever. As you will need to have some vaccinations weeks or months before travel, it is best to see your doctor six to eight weeks before you go. However, if you have to travel at short notice, you can still have some vaccines.

Your doctor will be able to advise which vaccines are suitable for you depending on:

- your medical history and age
- your destination and likely accommodation
- the season in which you are travelling
- the length of stay
- the type of travel, for example, bus tour or backpacking.

### Tips for older travellers

For older people, the risk of death or serious illness while travelling is the same, or even less, than staying at home.

However, planning is important, so before travelling:

- See your doctor for a check-up and discuss your fitness for the trip you are planning.
  - See your dentist and optometrist.
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- Pack a spare pair of glasses, any medications you need and a small medical kit.
- Organise travel health insurance with pre-existing illness cover if needed. Make sure it covers emergency evacuation.
- Make sure routine immunisations are up to date and get vaccinated against influenza and pneumonia.
- Consider your back and joints – use luggage with built-in wheels.
- Take clothes and hats to suit the climate.
- If you are concerned about your health or the health of someone you are travelling with, consider taking an organised holiday.

### Tips for travellers with a disability

Travellers with a disability will need to make sure in advance that their needs can be accommodated while travelling and should consider:

- making arrangements for wheelchairs, guide dogs and seating needs well in advance
- finding out about the medical facilities in the areas you will be visiting
- getting a letter from your doctor detailing your medical requirements or conditions
- carrying a medical alert bracelet or pendant for specific conditions.

### Eating and drinking while travelling

The most common travel-related illnesses are gastrointestinal diseases, usually picked up from poorly prepared foods or untreated water. To avoid diarrhoea, stomach pains, nausea and vomiting associated with these illnesses:

- Use boiled or bottled water, or water purifiers or tablets.
- Avoid ice in drinks.
- Avoid unpasteurised milk and dairy products.
- Avoid fruit and vegetables that have been washed in the local water.
- Eat thick-skinned fruit and vegetables that you can peel yourself, such as bananas, oranges and mandarins.
- Make sure food is cooked thoroughly and eat it while it's hot.
- Avoid shellfish.
- Don't buy food from street stalls – hotels and busy restaurants are safest.
- Take care with personal hygiene.

### Avoid mosquito bites when travelling

Some serious infectious diseases such as **malaria**, **Zika virus**, **yellow fever** and **dengue fever**, are transmitted by mosquitoes. While there are vaccines and medications available to help protect against some of these diseases, travellers are advised to always protect against mosquito bites.

Some tips include:

- Wear mosquito repellent that contains at least 30 per cent DEET or 20 per cent picaridin.
- Stay indoors between dusk and dawn. The mosquitoes carrying the malaria parasite generally feed at this time.
- Clothing, bedding, mosquito nets and tents can be soaked in a safe repellent (such as permethrin) prior to travel.
- Wear socks, long pants, and long-sleeve shirts when outdoors.
- Use a bed net.
- Stay in air-conditioned, screened accommodation.

### Sexually transmissible infections and travel

**HIV** and other **sexually transmissible infections (STIs)** are endemic in many countries, particularly in Africa and Southeast Asia. Always practise **safe sex** by using condoms.

## Where to get help

- **Your GP (doctor)**
- A pharmacist
- A travel health clinic
- Your travel agent
- Your travel insurance company
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – **Smarttraveller**
- **Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – 24-hour consular assistance** +61 2 6261 3305 from overseas. 1300 555 135 from within Australia, +61 421 269 080 for SMS
- Immunisation Program, Department of Health & Human Services, Victorian Government Tel. 1300 882 008
- National Immunisation Information Tel. 1800 671 811
- The **Australian embassy or consulate** in the country you are in and follow the telephone prompts. (Most will have a list of local doctors or hospitals. If you do not speak the language, ask for someone who speaks English.)
- A doctor, hospital or health service in the area where you are staying

## Top tips

Check out our top travel tips in the slideshow below.

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