

Travelling outside the country?

If you are planning to travel outside the country, tell your doctor as far in advance as you can. You may not want to worry about travel risks — but what you don't know may hurt you or make you sick!

To stay safe and healthy, you may need to know and do (or not do) certain things. It all depends on where you go, how you get there, what you do there, and how healthy you are when you leave.

This booklet tells you a little about some of the:

- risks you should know about and precautions you can take
- places to find more information

Some of the things that you may need to get before you leave are:

- “ vaccinations (“shots”) against infections like hepatitis, polio, rabies, tetanus, typhoid
- “ refills for your regular prescriptions
- “ medications to treat diarrhea and prevent malaria
- “ proof of vaccination against certain infections
- “ medical insurance and special supplies (first aid kit, DEET insect repellent, mosquito netting treated with permethrin, sunscreen, water purification kit, etc.)

Unless you take suitable precautions, you could get:

- ‘ diarrhea, hepatitis A, or polio from contaminated food and drinks
- ‘ dengue fever, malaria or yellow fever from insect bites, or rabies from animal bites
- ‘ dehydration, sunburn, and sunstroke from too much sun, heat, and humidity
- ‘ hepatitis B or HIV (from unprotected sex), poorly screened blood (if you need a transfusion), poorly cleaned equipment (acupuncture, piercing, medical, surgical or tattooing)
- ‘ infections, parasites, or tetanus (“lock-jaw”) by walking barefoot
- ‘ assaulted or robbed while exploring
- ‘ injured or killed in sporting or traffic accidents

Take action to stay healthy and safe: plan ahead, be prepared, and do what your doctor recommends.

Food and drink safety

The best advice is to “boil it, cook it, peel it — or forget it.”

Water in many tropical and developing countries can transmit diseases such as cholera, dysentery, giardiasis, hepatitis A, typhoid fever, and polio. Be sure to:

- T drink hot tea or coffee made with boiled water
- T avoid ice cubes — freezing will not kill the organisms (and neither will alcohol!)
- T drink bottled water or carbonated drinks in sealed containers from reputable sources only

Note: If you cannot get safe bottled water, boil your water or purify it with special commercial filters and/or chemical treatment (chlorine or iodine).

Raw **fruits, salads, and vegetables** can transmit some of the same diseases as contaminated water. (Strawberries and leafy vegetables like lettuce and cabbage are particularly hard to clean.) So, avoid salad bars and cold buffets. Eat only cooked vegetables. Eat only cooked fruit or fruit that you peel yourself.

Unpasteurized **dairy products** can transmit brucellosis and tuberculosis. Use only pasteurized products. Yogurt is usually safe, but ice cream and custards are NOT safe.

Bacteria can grow quickly on cold **meat and seafood**, especially in high heat and humidity.

- T eat only well-cooked meat that is served hot
- T eat only well-cooked fish and seafood (especially shellfish, which filter large volumes of water and concentrate many infectious organisms)

Personal safety

Avoid travelling alone. Don't flash your money, jewelry, or possessions. Don't drive or walk at night, in bad weather, or “off the beaten path.”

Don't take any unnecessary risks, especially if you don't speak the local language. Be very careful if you are driving a rented auto or moped, or walking or biking along roadways. Be at least as cautious as you would be in a large European or North American city.



Insect bites

Depending on where you go, mosquito and sandfly bites can infect you with malaria or other serious infections. Your first line of defence is to avoid insect bites.

The mosquitoes that transmit malaria are active from dusk until dawn. To avoid them:

- T when you go outside after dusk, wear light-coloured clothing with long sleeves and legs and apply DEET insect repellent to exposed skin
- T sleep in rooms that are well-screened or air-conditioned
- T use a “knock-down” (insecticidal) bug spray to kill any mosquitoes that entered the room during the day
- T surround your bed with mosquito netting that has been treated with permethrin

The mosquitoes and flies that transmit dengue fever, Japanese encephalitis, leishmaniasis, West Nile virus, and yellow fever bite during the day. Use suitable clothing and insect repellent to avoid their bites too.

Blood and body fluids

Contact with the blood or body fluid of an infected person can transmit serious infections such as HIV or hepatitis B. In many developing countries, a larger portion of the population is infected and the risk of transmission is much higher than in North America.

You can also be exposed through blood transfusions, unsterilized instruments (needles, razors, scalpels, syringes, etc), and sexual contact.

To reduce the risk of these types of infection while travelling, avoid:

- X unprotected sexual activity
- X acupuncture, body piercings, and tattoos
- X sharing syringes and razors

Also, be extra careful to avoid injury, so that you won't need medical or surgical treatment, or blood transfusions.

Looking for more information?

This booklet does not include everything you need to know about travel health risks.

Fortunately, a lot of good travel information is available on the Internet, if you know where to look.

Start your search at one of these reliable sites. Each has:

- a different layout and unique features (but much of the same information)
- separate information for travellers and health care providers

Health Canada (www.TravelHealth.gc.ca)

This site includes:

- < information in English and French
- < country-by-country listings of risks
- < information about health and personal safety risks
- < currency, legal, political and visa information
- < up-to-date travel advisories
- < a list of Travel Medicine clinics in Canada

US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.CDC.gov/travel)

This site includes information:

- < in English and Spanish
- < on a regional basis
- < about infectious disease risks and other health risks
- < on recent travel advisories

World Health Organization (www.WHO.int/ith)

This site includes information:

- < in English, French, and Spanish
- < on a regional basis
- < about infectious disease risks and other health risks
- < travel advisories

Talk to your doctor about your plans, and bring along copies of any information you have found.

