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## International Travel: Tips for Staying Healthy

Here are some tips to help you stay healthy when you travel to other countries:

### Before you go

- Plan ahead. See your doctor at least 6 weeks before you leave. Some vaccines don't reach the highest protection until about 6 weeks after you get the shots.
- Have medical and dental check-ups before your trip, to be aware of problems and to find out about medicines you might want to take along.
- Be prepared. Find out what your health insurance will pay for if you see a doctor while you're in another country. Carry enough of your regular medicines in their original containers, along with extra prescriptions for them. Also bring your eyewear prescriptions. Wear a medical information bracelet if needed. Take along a first-aid kit (see suggestions below).

### Vaccines you might get

Your doctor will review the plans for your trip and decide if you need any vaccines. The vaccines you got when you were a child also may need to be updated if you are not fully protected. Vaccines that may be needed to protect you include the following:

- Hepatitis A or hepatitis A immune globulin
- Hepatitis B
- Influenza (the flu)
- Japanese encephalitis
- Measles-mumps-rubella
- Meningococcal meningitis
- Pneumococcal
- Polio
- Rabies
- Tetanus and diphtheria toxoids
- Typhoid fever
- Varicella (chickenpox)
- Yellow fever

### A note about vaccines

Sometimes the amount of a certain vaccine cannot keep up with the number of people who need it. [More info...](#)

### While you're traveling

- Eat carefully if you're going to a country with an increased risk of traveler's diarrhea. Steaming-hot, well-cooked food is usually safest. Avoid eating foods from street vendors, unpasteurized dairy products, and raw or uncooked seafood. Peel fruits yourself. Drink water from commercially sealed bottles or drink carbonated beverages. Avoid ice. Use bottled water when you brush your teeth.
- If you're going to a country with a risk of malaria, take preventive medicine for malaria as prescribed by your doctor. Remember to start taking your malaria medicine before you leave on your trip, take it during your travels

and keep taking it for 4 weeks after you get home.

- Avoid swimming and other water activities in freshwater lakes and streams. Schistosomiasis (also called bilharziasis) is a disease you might be exposed to in some African streams and lakes.
- If you're going to a country with an increased risk of mosquito-borne disease, protect yourself against insects. Insect repellents that contain DEET work the best. Wear permethrin-coated clothing and use bed nets while you sleep.
- Try to avoid taking overcrowded transportation. Try not to ride in vehicles without safety belts. Wear a helmet if you'll be riding a motorcycle. Try to avoid driving at night or in unfamiliar areas without local help and directions.

## Things to include in a first-aid kit for traveling

- Your prescription medicines, in their original containers.
- Medicine for diarrhea and upset stomach. Talk to your doctor about getting a prescription for an antibiotic you can take in case you get traveler's diarrhea. Pack bismuth subsalicylate (brand name: Pepto Bismol), loperamide (brand name: Imodium) and antacids.
- Cough and cold medicines.
- Pain medicines, such as aspirin, acetaminophen (one brand name: Tylenol), naproxen (brand name: Aleve), ibuprofen (one brand name: Motrin) or ketoprofen (brand name: Orudis KT).
- Decongestants and antihistamines for allergies. The kinds that don't cause sleepiness are better when you're traveling.
- Antibiotic ointment, adhesive bandages, hydrocortisone cream, moleskin for blisters, sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15 and lip balm.
- Medicine for motion sickness, such as dimenhydrinate (one brand name: Dramamine), and an antinausea drug like promethazine (brand name: Phenergan). Acetazolamide (brand name: Diamox) may help prevent altitude sickness.
- Scissors, tweezers, nail clippers, pocket knife, thermometer and mirror.

## Other Organizations

World Health Organization

<http://www.who.int/ith>

International Society of Travel Medicine

<http://www.istm.org>

1-770-736-7060

American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene

<http://www.astmh.org>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/travel>

## Source

[Travel Medicine: Helping Patients Prepare for Trips Abroad](http://www.aafp.org/afp/980800ap/dick.html) (*American Family Physician* August 1998,

<http://www.aafp.org/afp/980800ap/dick.html>)

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This handout provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this handout applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your family doctor.

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