

HEALTHY HOLIDAYS ARE HAPPY HOLIDAYS

“Good travel advice is that which has a chance to be followed by the traveller”. Often in Primary Care we see patients that have booked a last minute exotic holiday. They are ecstatic but unfortunately it does not give us sufficient time to prepare and give the appropriate advice and vaccines. For example Kenya is now a popular holiday resort but you require the Yellow Fever vaccine. The certificate is not valid until 10 days after the vaccine has been given, possibly presenting a problem at passport control in Kenya.

Whether travelling on your own, with family or on business, travel abroad is usually a time to enjoy. By following some simple steps you can ensure you and your family will have a happy, healthy and safe trip.

Prevention is better than cure

You can prevent most common travel related illnesses with simple precautions: taking care with food and water, preventing insect bites and having the correct vaccines at least 4 weeks prior to travel. Back packers and travellers with other problems i.e. the elderly, diabetics and pregnant women may need to visit at least 4-6mths prior to travelling.

Food and Water

To help guard against traveller’s diarrhea, Hepatitis A and Typhoid fever, precautions should be taken especially in countries where hygiene is poor.

Always wash hands after going to the toilet, handling food and before eating.

Avoid ice in drinks.

Drink, wash and clean teeth with bottled water if you are unsure about the quality of tap water.

Eat freshly cooked food which is still piping hot; avoid food that has been kept warm or reheated.

Avoid uncooked food unless you can peel or shell it yourself, avoid salad, peel all fruit.

Be careful with fish and shellfish.

Prevention of Insect Bites

Mosquitoes are a nuisance and can spread serious diseases, which can include Yellow fever, Malaria, Japanese B encephalitis and Dengue fever.

Simple advice would include:

Cover the skin with light, loose clothing, long sleeves and trousers.

Use reliable insect repellent (high Deet content over 33%) although always read instructions and use with caution in children under 5 years and pregnant women.

Plug in insecticides.

Mosquito nets impregnated with repellent.

Take some antihistamines with you on holiday, ointment and creams available. These reduce inflammation and swelling.

Malaria

Is one of the more common and serious of the tropical diseases. Children under 5 years and pregnant women in endemic areas are at greatest risk of dying from the disease. The most lethal form of malaria is on the increase.

Ideally, you should seek advice on Malaria at least 8 weeks prior to travel. You are at risk by travelling to malarious areas without taking the correct medication and you should continue to finish the course on your return from holiday.

Sun Safety

Skin cancer is on the increase so it is important to follow a few simple guidelines to prevent potential problems later on:

Stay in the shade between 11am – 3pm, this is when the sun is at its strongest.

Cover up with sunhats, tee-shirts, sunglasses, remember feet!

Take extra care with children.

Use high factor sun cream 15+ and reapply after swimming and washing. Make sure you never burn.

Drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration.

Sexually transmitted diseases (STD)

Unprotected sex carries the risk of transmission of infections including Gonorrhoea, Chlamydia, Hepatitis B and HIV. Many STD's are widespread and transmission can occur anywhere.

Casual sex is risky – condoms provide good protection, but ideally purchased from this country!

Alcohol and drugs provoke risky behaviour.

Remember HIV, Hepatitis B can be spread through invasive procedures such as tattooing, body piercing, injections, blood transfusions etc.

Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)

A few tips to help prevent possible risk of DVT on long haul flights:

Be comfortable in your seat.

Bend and straighten legs, feet and toes regularly.

Take occasional short walks around aircraft.

Drink plenty of water and be sensible about alcohol which in excess leads to dehydration.

I have tried to include some of the most important travel tips in this article, but remember be prepared and prevention is better than cure. Make an early appointment at the surgery to chat about vaccines and always have good travel insurance. Below are a few websites that you may like to have a look at.

www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk
WWW.malariahotspots.co.uk
WWW.apmsd.co.uk
WWW.masta.org

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References:

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