

Stay Healthy While Traveling Abroad

Are you planning a trip to other countries? Remember: healthy travel requires planning, preparation, self-discipline, and vigilance.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) sends inspectors and other employees all over the world to check that products it regulates, which are made in other countries, are legal and safe for use by U.S. consumers.

In the Guide to International Inspections, FDA advises employees on safe and healthy travel basics. Here are a few pointers that can help you stay healthy, too.

BEFORE YOU GO

Do some research. Learn about access to reliable medical care at your destination. Also read up on current events there. Good resources include

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Travelers' Health (wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/default.aspx)
- The CIA World Fact Book (www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html)
- U.S. Department of State Travel Information (http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1765.html)

Don't buy medicines abroad. Many drugs sold in developing countries contain impure or toxic ingredients. Don't buy any medical prod-

uct without consulting a competent health care professional. United States embassies can often recommend physicians, although the amount of help they are able to provide may vary.

Take an ample supply of medications. Keep prescription and over-the-counter medications in their original packaging to avoid problems with border guards. Carry one or two days' worth of prescription medicine to cover unexpected delays. Consider carrying sunscreen and protection against insects, as well as treatments for the common cold; constipation; cuts, scratches, and burns; diarrhea; heartburn or indigestion; insomnia; motion sickness; allergies; nasal congestion; pain or fever; sore throat; and malaria prevention.

Don't use Entero-Vioform. This drug, widely distributed abroad for treating diarrhea, has been linked to nervous system complications.



Think about immunizations. Consult your health care professional weeks in advance, since some immunizations are administered over weeks or months. Also, check CDC's Web site for information on immunizations for travelers (wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/content/Vaccinations.aspx)

Photo Collage: FDA/Michael Ermarth

Consider altitude. Even healthy, athletic people can become ill at altitudes above 10,000 feet. Young children are especially at risk. If you're going to high altitudes, plan to rest during the first 12 to 24 hours there to adjust to breathing in less oxygen. People with chronic heart and lung disorders should consult a physician before traveling to altitudes above 3,000 feet.

TIPS FOR THE TRIP

Exercise. During long trips, help avoid circulatory problems in your legs by standing up and walking for several minutes every hour or so.

Eat and drink wisely. Drink plenty of liquids. Avoid overindulgence. Too much alcohol and/or food can result in gastrointestinal problems, poor sleep, and altered moods.

Fight off jet lag. Minimize fatigue associated with time-zone hopping by eating normally. Try to get a good initial night's sleep at your destination.

WHILE IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Avoid tap water in all forms. This includes ice, water by the glass or in mixed drinks, and water used when brushing your teeth. In developing countries, water may be contaminated by such unpleasantnesses as amoebas and other parasites, and the virus that causes hepatitis. Even a small amount of infected water can make you ill.

Drink safe beverages. These include

- Boiled water – one minute of boiling is adequate.
- Hot beverages – these are relatively safe even if full boiling is not assured.
- Bottled water – carbonated water is the best assurance that the container was just opened and not filled at the tap.
- Bottled or canned beverages
- Treated water – commercial

iodine or chlorine tablets provide substantial protection if added to tap water and allowed to stand according to the directions.

Avoid raw fruits and vegetables. This includes salads and uncooked vegetables. Eat only food that has been cooked and is still hot, or fruit that has been washed in clean water and that you have peeled. Fruits and vegetables that grow near to the ground are likely to be contaminated by the same organisms as the tap water.

Avoid other foods. These include

- Raw or undercooked meat, poultry, fish and eggs
- Dairy products from small independent vendors
- Food that has been left unrefrigerated, especially food containing meat, poultry, eggs and dairy products

Eat safe foods. These include

- Thoroughly cooked fruits and vegetables
- Fruits with a thick covering (citrus fruits, bananas, and melons), which you peel yourself
- Thoroughly cooked meat, poultry, eggs and fish. (Pork and lamb should be well done; beef can be medium)
- Dairy products from large commercial dairies

ILLNESSES TO AVOID

Diarrhea. The most common cause of tourists' diarrhea can be treated with over-the-counter, "upset-stomach" products. (Buy these before you leave.) Effective drugs that control the frequency of diarrhea include Lomotil (diphenoxylate), lmodium (loperamide), and Kaopectate. Remember that adequate fluid intake is essential to preventing dehydration. Find reliable medical help if you have severe abdominal cramps, severe abdominal pain, high fever, blood or mucus in your stool, and/or severe dehydration.


Respiratory diseases. Many diseases—including influenza, tuberculosis, and diphtheria—are spread through sneezing, coughing, or talking. Consult your physician about testing and immunization.

Mosquito-borne diseases. These include malaria, yellow fever, dengue, and Japanese B encephalitis. To avoid mosquitoes

- Bring plenty of liquid mosquito repellent with at least 30% of the active ingredient Diethyltoluamide (DEET).
- Wear long sleeves and long pants.
- Sleep in a bed protected by mosquito netting, if needed.

Schistosomiasis. Swimmers need to know that many freshwater ponds in South America, Africa, and Asia are infested with a parasite that causes a chronic disease called schistosomiasis. Chlorinated pools and salt water are generally safe from infectious diseases.

WHEN YOU RETURN

Some travelers should have a physical examination including blood tests and stool analysis upon returning home. The need for specific tests will depend on where you went, how long you stayed, and what you did. Consult with your physician before you go and schedule an appointment for your return if advisable. 

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