

## How To Stay Healthy and Safe While Travelling Overseas



Travelling overseas for work or on a family vacation can be the opportunity of a lifetime, but there can also be health and safety risks.

While some may fear natural disasters like tsunamis and earthquakes, the real dangers affecting overseas travellers are more likely to be water, mosquitoes, and even car accidents.

According to Dr. Douglas Zeiger, Infectious Disease and Travel Medicine Specialist at New York University Medical Center and the Hospital for Joint Diseases, “If you’re going to get sick, it’s probably going to be from insect bites or from contaminated water. The most common sicknesses are not tremendously exotic. They include diarrhea, typhoid, and dengue fever.”<sup>1</sup>

That’s why planning ahead is so important. Knowing how to stay healthy and safe, including getting the proper vaccinations and taking precautions, could make the difference between a good trip and a miserable one.

### Before you leave

Make sure you have your vaccinations

When you begin planning your trip, schedule an appointment with your doctor approximately six weeks before departing to discuss and receive the appropriate vaccines for where you are travelling.

The ideal time for immunizations is four to six weeks before departing. This allows immunity to develop. Also, some shots may need to be given in a series, which may extend over a period of a few days or weeks.

There are three types of vaccinations you may need:

- **Routine:** These include shots such as tetanus that should be updated every 10 years whether you travel or not.
- **Recommended:** Immunizations that a doctor may recommend based on your travel plans. These may include shots for hepatitis A and B, typhoid, or yellow fever.
- **Required:** These are immunizations that a country may require before entry or that you may need for travel in. Currently, only the yellow fever vaccine is required by International Health Regulations if travelling in certain countries.

Additional advice regarding your health:

### TRAVEL ALERT

Each year millions travel abroad for vacation, business, or to visit friends and family. Unfortunately, many of these international travellers get sick or hurt during their trip.

For a listing of specific vaccines recommended for where you will be travelling, visit the Public Health Agency of Canada at <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/>



- If travelling with children, consult your pediatrician. Sometimes they need extra immunizations.
- More countries are requiring an Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) test for admittance. Check with the embassy or consulate of your travel destination to see if it's necessary.
- Always have a summary of your medical history and the name of your doctor and contact information with you.
- Research ahead of time to see if there are local health clinics and hospitals in the area.
- Take a health travel kit with you that includes prescriptions, anti-diarrheal medications, laxatives, antacids, insecticide spray or lotions, sunscreen, and adhesive bandages as well as other basic first-aid needs.
- Review your health coverage to make sure it protects you while travelling overseas.

### **Pre-Travel Health Checklist**

- ✓ Meet with doctor
- ✓ Get vaccines
- ✓ Fill any prescriptions
- ✓ Assemble travel health kit
- ✓ Review health insurance coverage

Plan accommodations safely

In addition to your health, it is also important to stay safe.

According to the World Health Organization, injuries are the leading cause of preventable deaths in travellers (90 percent), while infectious diseases only account for 2 percent of deaths.<sup>2</sup>

#### **TRAVEL ALERT**

Roadside crashes are a leading cause of all travel-related deaths in foreign countries.

To minimize your risk of an accident or injury while traveling, follow these tips:

- Rent larger vehicles for greater protection in the event of a crash.
- Check out the safety information on your destination ahead of time. A good resource is the Association for Safe International Road Travel at [www.asirt.org](http://www.asirt.org).
- Consider special health and evacuation insurance coverage. Many developing countries lack medical facilities and evacuation assistance.
- Avoid small, unscheduled aircrafts.
- Plan “adventure” activities (e.g. hiking, white water rafting, rock climbing, etc.) wisely.
- Select hotel accommodations on the sixth floor or lower to prevent fire injuries and above the ground floor to prevent a break-in or other criminal activity.
- Before you go, check the U.S. State Department’s website for the latest travel advisories for your destination: [http://travel.state.gov/travel/travel\\_1744.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/travel_1744.html).

## While you're at your destination

When travelling overseas, you not only need to think about what to do before you leave to stay healthy and safe, but also what precautions are essential during your stay. Specific vaccines and travel accommodations will help, but you also need to be more aware and be your own best doctor.

Always take the following precautions at any destination:

- wash hands often with soap and water;
- only eat and drink pasteurized dairy products; and
- eat only foods that are cooked thoroughly or peeled fruits and vegetables.

In developing areas:

- drink only bottled or boiled water;
- avoid tap water and beverages with ice;
- stay away from street-vendor foods;
- don't walk around barefoot;
- protect yourself from insect bites with appropriate insect repellents; and
- limit travel at night, travel with a companion, and vary your travel habits.

## When you return back home

When returning to Canada, you will not need to receive any special vaccines or undergo a health review. However, if you become ill, inform your doctor immediately.

## How will your health insurance work while travelling abroad?

When travelling far from home, the unexpected can happen. If you get hurt or become ill, receiving any kind of medical treatment can be expensive.

Prior to leaving on your trip, you should review your current insurance policy to make sure you're covered while away. Some plans may limit coverage overseas.

If it does, you may want to consider adding the **IEEE-sponsored Gateway International Insurance Plans** to help protect you.

The Gateway Plans offer insurance solutions for situations where existing coverage is limited or not available outside your home country. Insurance is available for both short- and long-term stays for members, families, and associates.

The plans offer insurance and services such as:

- coverage for medical expenses due to accidents and illnesses;
- transportation expenses associated with medical evacuation and repatriation;
- indemnity in event of accidental death or dismemberment; and
- worldwide travel and medical assistance services.

For more information on the IEEE-sponsored Gateway International Insurance Plans and an instant quote, visit product page (Travel Insurance) at [IEEEInsurance.com](http://IEEEInsurance.com).

By following these simple tips and making sure you have medical coverage in place, your time abroad will be relatively worry-free. So have a great trip!

This coverage is available to residents of Canada through Marsh Canada Limited. Stephen Fretwell, an employee of Marsh Canada Limited, acts as broker with respect to residents of Canada.

<sup>1</sup> “Stay-Healthy Travel Abroad Tips,” Elisabeth Eaves, 02-23-07, [www.forbes.com](http://www.forbes.com), [http://www.forbes.com/travel/2007/02/22/abroad-travel-healthy-forbeslife-cx\\_ee\\_0223healthytravel.html](http://www.forbes.com/travel/2007/02/22/abroad-travel-healthy-forbeslife-cx_ee_0223healthytravel.html), Viewed 11/9/09.

<sup>2</sup> Center for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC Health Information for International Travel 2008, <http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/yellowBookCh6-Injuries.aspx>, Viewed 11/9/2009.

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