

# Travel Health Advice Leaflet

The following information will help you to stay healthy on your trip.

## **WATER**

Diseases can be caught from drinking contaminated water, or swimming in it. Unless you know the water supply is safe where you are staying, **ONLY USE** (in order of preference)

1. Boiled water
2. Bottled water or canned drinks
3. Water treated by a sterilising agent.

This includes ice cubes in drinks and water for cleaning your teeth

## **SWIMMING**

It is safer to swim in water that is well chlorinated. If you are travelling to Africa, South America or some parts of the Caribbean, avoid swimming in fresh water lakes and streams. You can catch a parasitic disease called SCHISTOSOMIASIS from such places. This disease is also known as BILHARZIA. It is also wise never to go barefoot, but to wear protective footwear when out, even on the beach. Other diseases can be caught from sand and soil, particularly wet soil.

## **FOOD**

Contaminated food is the commonest source of many diseases abroad. You can help prevent it by following these guidelines:

- ONLY EAT WELL COOKED FRESH FOOD
- AVOID LEFTOVERS and REHEATED FOODS
- ENSURE MEAT IS THOROUGHLY COOKED
- EAT COOKED VEGETABLES, AVOID SALADS
- ONLY EAT FRUIT YOU CAN PEEL
- NEVER DRINK UNPASTEURISED MILK
- AVOID ICE-CREAM
- SHELLFISH IS A HIGH RISK FOOD
- AVOID BUYING FOOD FROM STREET VENDOR'S STALLS AS A GENERAL RULE

***Two phrases to help you remember***  
**“COOK IT, PEEL IT, OR LEAVE IT!”**  
**“WHEN IN DOUBT, LEAVE IT OUT!”**

Another source of calories is alcohol! If you drink to excess, alcohol could lead you to become carefree and ignore these precautions

## **PERSONAL HYGIENE**

Many diseases are transmitted by what is known as the 'faecal-oral' route. To help prevent this, always wash your hands with soap and clean water, after going to the toilet, before eating and before handling food.

## **TRAVELLERS' DIARRHOEA**

This the **most common illness** that you will be exposed to abroad and there is **NO vaccine against it**. Diarrhoea is caused by eating and/or drinking food and water contaminated by bacteria, viruses or parasites. Risk of illness is higher in some countries than others.

**High risk areas** include North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, the Indian Subcontinent, S.E. Asia, South America, Mexico and the Middle East.

**Medium risk areas** include the northern Mediterranean, Canary Islands and the Caribbean Islands.

**Low risk areas** include North America, Western Europe and Australia

You can certainly help **prevent** travellers' diarrhoea in the way you **behave** - make sure you follow the food, water and personal hygiene guidelines already given.

### **What is travellers' diarrhoea?**

Travellers' diarrhoea is 4 or more loose stools in a 24 hour period often accompanied by stomach pain, cramps and vomiting. It usually lasts 2-4 days and whilst it is not a life threatening illness, it can disrupt your trip for several days. The main danger of the illness is **dehydration**, and this, if very severe, can kill if it is not treated. **Treatment** is therefore **rehydration**. In severe cases and particularly in young children and the elderly, commercially prepared rehydration solution is extremely useful.

### **Travel well prepared**

A good tip is to take oral rehydration solutions with you. These can be bought over the counter in a chemist shop, available in tablet or sachet form - for example: **DIORALYTE or ELECTROLADE or DIORALYTE RELIEF** (The latter is a newer formula containing rice powder which also helps to relieve the diarrhoea, particularly useful in children). Prepare according to instructions.

### **Anti diarrhoeal tablets**

Can be used for adults but should NEVER be USED in children under 4 years of age, and only on prescription for children aged 4 to 12 years.

Commonly used tablets are IMODIUM and LOMOTIL

**None of these tablets should ever be used if the person has a temperature or blood in the stool.**

### **Do contact medical help if the affected person has:-**

- A temperature
- Blood in the diarrhoea
- Diarrhoea for more than 48 hours (or 24 hours in children)
- Becomes confused

In very special circumstances, antibiotics are used for diarrhoea, but this decision would usually be made by a doctor. A woman taking the oral contraceptive pill may not have full contraceptive protection if she has had diarrhoea and vomiting. Extra precautions must be used - refer to your 'pill' information leaflet. If using condoms, take a supply of good quality ones with you.

## **HEPATITIS B and HIV INFECTION**

### **These diseases can be transmitted by**

- Blood transfusion
- Medical procedures with non sterile equipment
- Sharing of needles (e.g. tattooing, body piercing, acupuncture and drug abuse)
- Sexual contact — Sexually transmitted infections or STI's are also transmitted this way

### **Ways to protect yourself**

- Only accept a blood transfusion when essential
- If travelling to a developing country, take a sterile medical kit
- Avoid procedures e.g. ear and body piercing, tattooing & acupuncture
- Avoid casual sex, especially without using condoms

**Remember!** Excessive alcohol can make you carefree and lead you to take risks you otherwise would not consider.

## **INSECT BITES**

Mosquitoes, certain types of flies, ticks and bugs can cause many different diseases. e.g. malaria, dengue fever, yellow fever. Some bite at night, but some during daytime.

### **AVOID BEING BITTEN BY:**

- Covering up your skin as much as possible if going out at night, (mosquitoes that transmit malaria bite from dusk until dawn).
- Wear loose fitting clothes, long sleeves, trousers or long skirts.
- Use insect repellents on exposed skin. (Choose those containing DEET or eucalyptus oil base. A content up to **50%** DEET is recommended for tropical destinations.) Clothes can be sprayed with repellents too. Impregnated wrist and ankle bands are also available. Check suitability for children on the individual products.
- If room is not air conditioned, but screened, close shutters early evening and spray the room with knockdown insecticide spray.
- In malarious regions, if camping, or sleeping in unprotected accommodation, always sleep under a mosquito net (impregnated with permethrin). Avoid camping near areas of stagnant water, as these are common breeding areas for mosquitoes etc.
- Electric insecticide vaporisers are very effective as long as there are no power failures! Electric buzzers, garlic and vitamin B are ineffective. Homeopathic and herbal medications should NEVER be used as an alternative to conventional advice for malaria prevention.

## **MALARIA**

Remember, malaria is a disease spread by mosquitoes, there is no vaccine yet available so prevention is:

**Awareness of the risk**

**Bite prevention**

**Chemoprophylaxis (taking the correct tablets)**

**Diagnosis (knowing the symptoms and acting quickly)**

## **ANIMAL BITES**

Rabies is present in many parts of the world. If a person develops rabies, death is 100% certain. There are:

### **3 RULES REGARDING RABIES**

1. Do not touch any animal, even dogs and cats
2. If you are licked on broken skin or bitten in a country which has rabies, wash the wound thoroughly with soap and running water for 10 minutes then apply an antiseptic solution to the affected area
3. Seek medical advice IMMEDIATELY, even if you have been previously immunised, this is absolutely essential

## **ACCIDENTS**

A major leading cause of death in travellers abroad is due to **accidents**, predominantly road traffic accidents and swimming/water accidents. You can help prevent them by following sensible precautions :

### **PRECAUTIONARY GUIDELINES**

- Avoid alcohol and food before swimming
- Never dive into water where the depth is uncertain
- Only swim in safe water, check currents, sharks, jellyfish etc.
- Avoid alcohol when driving, especially at night
- Avoid hiring motorcycles and mopeds
- If hiring a car, rent a large one if possible, ensure the tyres, brakes and seat belts are in good condition
- Use reliable taxi firms, know where emergency facilities are

## **INSURANCE COVER**

Take out adequate insurance cover for your trip. This should possibly include medical repatriation as without it, this service if needed is extremely expensive. If you have any pre existing medical conditions, make sure you inform the insurance company of these details and check the small print of the policy thoroughly. If you travel to a European Union country, make sure you have obtained an EHIC card before you travel. The EHIC application form is available by ringing telephone 0300 330 1350 or by applying online at <https://www.gov.uk/european-health-insurance-card> This takes time to obtain so needs to be applied for in advance. Additional travel insurance is still advised.

## **AIR TRAVEL**

It is sensible on any long haul flight to be comfortable in your seat. Exercise your legs, feet and toes while sitting every half an hour or so, and take short walks whenever feasible. Upper body and breathing exercises can further improve circulation. Drink plenty of water and be sensible about alcohol intake which in excess leads to dehydration. Further information can be obtained from the Department of Health website detailed below with more specific advice and information on travel-related deep vein thrombosis and the National Travel Health Network and Centre.

[www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk) & [www.nathnac.org/travel/index.htm](http://www.nathnac.org/travel/index.htm)

## **SUN AND HEAT**

Sunburn and heat-stroke cause serious problems in travellers. Both are preventable - to avoid, use the following:

### **PRECAUTIONARY GUIDELINES**

Increase sun exposure gradually, 20 minutes limit initially. Use sun blocks of appropriate 'SPF' strength. A useful tool called the suncare factor calculator is available on [www.boots.com/en/Sun-Holiday/Sun-protection/Sun-protection-made-easy/](http://www.boots.com/en/Sun-Holiday/Sun-protection/Sun-protection-made-easy/) and guidelines for appropriate SPF strengths are in table below from this website. Children under 3 years should always have a minimum of SPF 25 and babies under 6 months should be kept out of the sun at all times.

	<b>Moderate</b> Northern Europe, UK /Eire		<b>Hot</b> Southern Europe / Mediterranean		<b>Very Hot</b> Tropics / Africa / Australia	
	First 3 days	3-days +	First 3 days	3-days +	First 3 days	3-days +
Children (3 yrs +)	25	15	35	25	35+	25
Sensitive / Fair	25	15	25	15	35	25
Tans/Tans easily	15	18	15	15	25	15

- Reapply protective sun block often and always after swimming and washing. Read manufacturer instructions.
- Wear protective clothing - sunhats etc.
- Avoid going out between 11am - 3pm, when the sun's rays are strongest.
- TAKE SPECIAL CARE of CHILDREN and those with pale skin/red hair.
- Drink extra fluids in a hot climate.
- Be aware that alcohol can make you dehydrated
- Wear protective clothing - sunhats etc.
- Avoid going out between 11am - 3pm, when the sun's rays are strongest.

### **USEFUL WEBSITES**

NHS public travel site - [www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk](http://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk)

National Travel Health Network and Centre - [www.nathnac.org](http://www.nathnac.org)

Foreign & Commonwealth Office - [www.fco.gov.uk/travel/](http://www.fco.gov.uk/travel/)

Sun awareness - [www.cancerresearchuk.org/SunSmart/](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/SunSmart/)

MASTA - [www.masta.org](http://www.masta.org)

Nomad travel store - [www.nomadtravel.co.uk](http://www.nomadtravel.co.uk)

NHS patient information - [www.patient.co.uk](http://www.patient.co.uk)