

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT TRAVEL MEDICINE

In the Clinic
Annals of Internal Medicine

What Potential Health Problems Should I Be Aware of When Traveling?

- Food- or water-borne infections, such as travelers' diarrhea
- Trauma or injury
- Deep venous thrombosis
- Exacerbation of chronic medical illnesses
- Insect-borne infections, such as malaria or dengue fever
- Skin or soft tissue infections or allergic reactions
- Other communicable diseases, such as HIV or other sexually transmitted infections

How Can I Stay Safe When Traveling?

- See your doctor at least a few weeks before traveling to find out whether you need any extra vaccines, prescription refills, or prescriptions for prevention or self-treatment while traveling.
- Bring an extra supply of home prescription medications.
- Bring over-the-counter medications for prevention or self-treatment of common ailments as well as travel-specific ailments, such as travelers' diarrhea, altitude illness, jet lag, motion sickness, and insect bites.
- Use condoms and other safer sex practices if engaging with a new sexual partner.
- Avoid illicit drugs or excessive alcohol consumption.
- Avoid traveling by motorcycle or scooter, traveling alone at night, and traveling in unmarked taxis or overcrowded buses, and always wear your seat belt.
- If you are going to a high-altitude area, try to sleep at a lower altitude with hikes to higher altitudes during the day. You may also consider limiting alcohol intake.
- If you get travelers' diarrhea, take bismuth or an antimotility agent.
- If you have bloody diarrhea, have a fever above 102 °F, or have been injured or sexually assaulted, seek medical care right away.
- In an emergency, contact your U.S. embassy (www.usembassy.gov).

How Can I Stay Safe in a Resource-Limited Area?

- If you are not sure that the water is clean, drink bottled water, soft drinks, or boiled or purified water. Do not use ice cubes unless you know they were made from clean water.
- Eat only piping hot food that has been cooked completely. Processed or packaged foods are usually safe. Don't eat food from street vendors.
- In general, don't purchase medicines or other medical supplies. If you need to, refer to a hotel physician or an international assistance agency.



How Can I Stay Safe From Insects and Animals?

- If you travel to an area with a lot of mosquitos, particularly if it is in a malaria-prone area, wear long sleeves and long pants. Sleep in rooms with screens, air conditioning, or bed netting. Wear DEET-based bug spray.
- To avoid ticks, don't walk in tall grass. Wear long-sleeved clothing that is tucked into closed shoes (not sandals). Check yourself daily for ticks.
- To avoid rabies, don't pet or touch stray dogs, monkeys, bats, or other animals. If an animal bites or scratches you, wash with soap and water and seek medical care right away.

How Can I Stay Safe on a Plane?

- If you use oxygen, call the airline ahead of time.
- Long flights can put you at risk for blood clots. To stay safe, drink plenty of water, get up and walk around often, and consider wearing compression stockings.
- If you are in your last trimester of pregnancy, make sure that the airline will allow you on the plane.

How Can I Stay Safe on a Cruise?

- If you get motion sickness, talk to your doctor or pharmacist about what might help.
- It is common for the flu and norovirus to be passed around on cruises. Norovirus causes diarrhea and other symptoms.
- Be sure to update your flu and COVID-19 vaccines before the cruise. Check whether there are any vaccine requirements before boarding.

Questions for My Doctor

- Do I need to take any medicines before I leave for my trip?
- Do I need any extra vaccines? Am I up-to-date on routine vaccines?
- What medicines should I bring with me?
- What should I do if there is an emergency?

For More Information



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel>

World Health Organization
www.who.int/ith/en/