

# Travel Health Hazards

## Health Hazards

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### "HEALTH TIP

Minor illnesses do occur whilst holidaying, and can be attributed in part to excess sun, alcohol, too little sleep - or excess of exotic foods!"

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### Sun

Excessive exposure to UV rays can result in premature skin aging and lead to skin cancer.

It is essential to use effective sunscreens / sunblock at regular intervals - i.e every 2-3 hrs.- particularly with children, or those who are fair skinned.

It is wise to avoid the sun between midday and mid afternoon or stay in the shade.

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### "HEALTH TIP

Between 12 and 3, Sit Under a Tree!"

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The use of wide brimmed sun hats to protect the head and neck are advised. Wear loose fitting clothing, made from closely woven fabric (that you can't see through)

Prevent dehydration by taking plenty of non alcoholic fluids.

Use sunglasses that filter UVA and UVB rays

Be aware that some medications can cause skin reactions on skin exposed to sunlight.

You may need to verify if your medication is likely to be a problem. Speak with your GP or Practice Nurse to find out more!

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## "HEALTH WISE

Remember to protect the skin wherever you holiday..... UV rays can reflect off water, as well as snow!"

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### Heat and Humidity

These elements ,in excess, can lead to exhaustion, dehydration and more seriously heat stroke.

In children and some adults "prickly heat" can be quite common, and some conditions like athletes foot can actually get worse.

To help, daily showering and wearing of cotton clothing can help to reduce the effects of heat and humidity on the individual.

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## "HEALTH WISE

In cases of mild dehydration and exhaustion, increased fluid intake of fruit or vegetable juices, clear soups, or tea can be beneficial."

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### Accidents / Insurance

It is an unfortunate reality that Road Traffic Accidents are the leading cause of death among travellers abroad.

The traveller should be aware that vehicle and road maintenance varies greatly from one country to another. It is also wise to get to know the local roads, and check any vehicle's overall state prior to hiring.

Above all - DO NOT DRINK AND DRIVE.

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## "DID YOU KNOW ?

The number of road accidents in India outnumber those in the UK by 100 to 1."

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If taking part in any new sport or activity Consider:

- Is tuition available?
  - Is the equipment well maintained?
  - Is your level of fitness good enough to undertake the activity?
  - It may also be wise to check any Insurance conditions, and read the small print!
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## "TRAVEL TIP

Remember that any High risk activities e.g Scuba diving, Climbing, Skiing, Parachuting can lead to accidents, you should ensure that you have adequate insurance cover, AND include cover for repatriation if necessary.

If you are a UK resident, or a UK national ensure you obtain EHIC Card online via [www.ehic.org.uk](http://www.ehic.org.uk) and follow the online prompts. Be aware that there are websites that charge fees for verification of status to obtain an EHIC card. Instead go via the official Department of Health NHS links to avoid unnecessary payments.

This entitles you to reduced, or free medical treatment in any EEA state, also including Iceland, Norway, and Liechtenstein."

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### Animals

There are relatively few areas of the world where Rabies is not present. Be suspicious of any animal that you come into contact with, and even if it is a "family pet".

Do not attempt to stroke, or pet animals that you do not know. In particular domestic dogs or cats, and wild animals such as bats, foxes, skunks, jackals, wild monkeys.

In most countries the dog is the main carrier of Rabies.

**NEVER ignore a bite.** If bitten you must : Immediately wash the wound thoroughly with soap or detergent then with Iodine or alcohol.

Seek medical attention as soon as possible and within 24hrs! You will need to commence a course of anti rabies injections.

For those who have had rabies injections before departure, you still need to seek medical attention at the earliest opportunity, to obtain further doses of anti rabies vaccine.

Finally, Inform the authorities of the location of the offending animal (if known).

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## "DID YOU KNOW ?

Even licks from animals in rabies endemic areas are potentially hazardous, and should be treated in the same way as a bite!

Snakes and Scorpions will strike or sting as a defensive response, and mainly at night.

Shoes or boots should be worn as protection mainly against mosquito and other insect bites, and as a precaution when walking outdoors in snake infested areas.

Shoes and clothes should be examined each morning as snakes and scorpions tend

to rest in them!

Following a sting or snake strike it is important to remember that you should:  
Seek medical attention as promptly as possible, anti venom may be needed.

Administer first aid and keep the casualty as comfortable as possible.

Know what species caused the bite, or at least be able to describe it."

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## **Travel**

Besides the stress related to travel and its effect on all concerned, Travel through time zones can have an exhausting effect on the traveller.

WEST bound travel results in a longer day.

EAST bound travel results in a shorter day whilst travelling from UK time.

Disruption of sleep and waking can be a problem. It is wise to schedule rest periods for the first few days of your holiday, to enable your body to adapt to the time changes.

NORTH - SOUTH travel time varies very little and as such will not usually affect people in the same way as West/East bound travel.

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## **"HEALTH WISE**

People who take REGULAR timed medication may need to obtain specific advice regarding timing of doses. For example with the contraceptive pill, or Insulin."

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## **Altitude**

Staying or travelling at higher altitude can be dangerous for people particularly with heart or lung problems.

At higher altitudes some people experience faintness, dizziness, headaches, nausea and vomiting.

These symptoms should be taken seriously, and usually results in individuals having to return to lower altitudes, where symptoms usually subside.

Gradual acclimatisation is recommended for all individuals who intend to travel at altitude.

PLEASE NOTE: Women who take Combined oral contraceptives and intend to travel for some time at altitudes of 4,500M or more, need to speak to their GP regarding the possibility changing to another form of contraception preferably a minimum of 3 months before travel.

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## "DID YOU KNOW ?

The effect of Alcohol potency increases at altitude."

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### **Bathing**

Fresh Water: Caution must be exercised if bathing or wading in fresh water as some diseases can be contracted from some fresh water sources in certain areas of the world. In particular with lakes or slow running streams, it is not advisable to enter the water.

Sea Water: Foreign waters contain marine life which are unfamiliar to us in the UK. Risks involve contact with jelly fish, poisonous fish, stinging fish, all which can cause painful stings; as well as sea anemones, and aquatic leeches being present in some waters.

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### **HEALTH TIP**

The use of footwear for wading in sea water, or walking on the beach is advisable, in order to protect the feet from injury or infection.

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### **Insects**

Transmission of various illnesses by bites from insects can occur.

At the very least they can be troublesome, and in the extreme, present the traveller with the risk of serious illness.

The less common diseases that can occur via the Sandfly, Tsetse fly, and some Mosquito borne diseases, mean there is no available vaccine or medication to help prevent illness - therefore it is essential that measures are carried out to prevent the bites occurring in the first instance!

Get advice from the Travel clinic relating to the specific risk for your journey. More advice relating to Bite Avoidance is detailed in the Malaria pages.

### **Food, Drink and Hygiene**

Diseases such as Hepatitis A, Typhoid, Salmonella, and Travellers diarrhoea can be caught by eating contaminated food or drink.

It is important that you follow strict food and water hygiene precautions.

### **You Must:**

- Avoid Ice in Drinks, unless made from bottled water. Also Ice cream or sorbets from street vendors
- Drink bottled water only - preferably carbonated.
- Brush your teeth with bottled water.
- Avoid uncooked shellfish e.g Oysters, and even cooked shellfish can be hazardous.

- Avoid uncooked foods e.g Salad (unless properly prepared by yourself)
- Do not eat reheated food or avoid food that has been kept warm, and which may have been exposed to flies.
- Avoid unpasteurised milk, and milk products.
- Prepare babies milk formula with pre boiled water.
- Backpackers who intend using Natural water sources for Drinking purposes need to be aware of the various methods for treating the water, to ensure it is Safe enough to drink.

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### **"HEALTH TIP**

**REMEMBER: If you can't peel, cook or boil it ...FORGET IT!"**

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### **Travellers Diarrhoea**

This is the most common complaint suffered by the majority of travellers worldwide. Almost one fifth of travellers will suffer from a travel related illness whilst overseas, or on return home.

It is essential to follow strict guidelines relating to food and drink hygiene as we have already mentioned, but if you are unfortunate enough to be suffering with Travellers diarrhoea, effective management is important, particularly with children and pregnant women.

Counter Dehydration: Liberal quantities of rehydration fluid is important to correct fluid loss. Make up rehydration sachets as directed, but with Bottled / pre boiled and cooled water!

Treatment: Primarily is rehydration, but adults may take anti -diarrhoeal preparations to ease symptoms. **THEY SHOULD NOT** be used for children or pregnant women.

Prevention: Personal hygiene is important, particularly with children. Adults must ensure that children undertake handwashing before meals and after toileting.

Be Aware: If fever is present, and diarrhoea persist for more than 48hrs, or become bloody in nature, it is essential to seek medical advice.

Pregnant Women: Should not attempt to self medicate, but seek medical advice promptly.

### **Sexual Health and Travel**

Travel abroad provides an opportunity to meet new people and can lead to unprotected casual sexual encounters.

This involves a significantly increased risk of contracting venereal disease, as well as the risk of Hepatitis B and HIV infection.

Avoiding such encounters is Absolute protection, the second best is to use a condom which is British made, as condoms purchased abroad may be of poor quality. Women can protect themselves by using the female condom.

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### **"BE AWARE**

Gastrointestinal sickness can result in the contraceptive pill not being able to be taken or absorbed properly. In these instances, you must use condoms for additional contraceptive cover, and obtain further detailed advice regarding contraceptive cover on return home.

Remember that in developing countries, any women using the cap as a method of contraception should ensure that the cap is properly cleansed in "safe water" (bottled or pre boiled and cooled)."

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### **Major Diseases and Precautions**

Diseases for which No Vaccine is currently available:

Some infections are spread by certain insects and snails, and cannot be prevented by vaccination.

Travellers must try to avoid exposure to these infections, and ensure any symptoms are recognised early.

Refer to the Travel Clinic for risks specific for your journey, and advice on prevention.

### **MOSQUITO BORNE INFECTIONS**

Dengue Fever (Haemorrhagic or Break Bone Fever)

### **FLUKE INFECTIONS**

Schistosomiasis (Bilharzia)

### **TICK BORNE DISEASES**

Borreliosis (Lyme Disease)

Tick Typhus

### **DISEASES SPREAD BY FLIES**

Onchocerciasis (River Blindness)

Leishmaniasis

African Trypanosomiasis (Sleeping Sickness)

There are currently vaccines available to help prevent many travel related diseases, these include:

- Diphtheria
- Meningitis A+C (X,Y)

- Tuberculosis
- Hepatitis A
- Poliomyelitis
- Typhoid
- Hepatitis B
- Tetanus
- Yellow Fever
- Japanese B Encephalitis
- Tick Borne Encephalitis
- Rabies
- Plague
- Influenza

(This list does not include other vaccines which are administered as part of the UK schedule for childhood immunisations)

Be aware that some vaccines are compulsory for certain areas of travel. You are advised to contact the Travel clinic regarding specific immunisation requirements for your trip.

## Malaria

Although no vaccine exists as yet for the protection of travellers against Malaria, there are medications available to help protect against this most serious disease. Different parts of the world have various types of Malaria, and the choice of tablets depends upon your destination, and duration of stay. Malaria is spread by mosquito bites, and is common in tropical countries.

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### **DID YOU KNOW ?**

**There are 5 types of Malaria!**

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Protection against Malaria is important it should be taken Every time you visit a country where malaria is prevalent...even if you have lived there before!

Remember the A B C D of Malaria

**Awareness** - know about your risk of Malaria.

Discuss your particular area(s) of travel at the Travel Clinic in order to assess your risk. Malaria is common in parts of Africa, Asia, and South America, but recommended medication varies from area to area, and person to person.

**Bites** - know how to prevent or avoid them

Prevention of mosquito bites is the ONLY way to ensure you don't contract Malaria.

Malarial mosquitoes bite between sunset and sunrise.

Simply remember - if you don't get bitten, you don't get malaria!

Use an Insect repellent, preferably one containing DEET.

Wear clothing to cover arms and legs, particularly after sunset.

Use a knock down spray to kill mosquitoes in your room at night before you go to bed.

Sleep in a properly screened room, or under a bed net.

Avoid wearing aftershave / perfumes / dark clothing as the female mosquito seems to have a preference for these!

**Comply** - with taking the appropriate anti-malaria medication as directed

Once you have been informed of your risk, you will then be advised on an appropriate medication to take to help avoid or reduce your malaria risk.

It is VERY important to take the medication as you have been advised, to commence before departure, for your duration of stay, and MOST importantly, that you continue for the full 4 weeks following your return from the malaria zone.

Take the medication with water and after food.

**Diagnosis** - Be aware of the possible signs of malaria and obtain treatment promptly

You need to be aware that although you may have taken all the precautions already mentioned, it is still possible that you could develop malaria.

No preventive medication is ever 100% effective.

You must seek medical attention if you develop fever, or flu type symptoms, or feel generally unwell - it could be malaria even up to 1 YEAR AFTER your trip.

REMEMBER to mention to your GP that you have been visiting a Country that has a Malaria problem.

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### "DID YOU KNOW ?

That here are 4 different group types of Malaria. It is possible for you to become infected with more than 1 type of malaria at any one time, in certain areas of the world

Recorded information and advice for travellers is available from the Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) Malaria Reference Laboratory on 0891 600350 (premium rates apply)"

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### Common Myths about Malaria

Information obtained from the [Roll Back Malaria campaign](#) - "General Information on Malaria"

**It's better not to take any medication as it masks the symptoms and makes diagnosis difficult**

**WRONG.** By not taking anti malaria medication whilst visiting a malaria zone, you

are putting yourself at risk of contracting a serious disease. The tablets help to keep the malaria from developing, and so reduce the speed of development and possibly the severity of the malaria in the first instance.

Because the medication slows the multiplication of Malaria parasite, it is possible that initially diagnosis could be difficult, but repeated blood samples will confirm if malaria is present before any serious illness develops.

### **There is a new deadly strain of Malaria**

**NOT TRUE.** Cerebral Malaria is not a new strain, but a complication of untreated Malaria. Early diagnosis and appropriate treatment should ensure that no one gets cerebral malaria.

### **Malaria cannot be cured**

**FALSE.** It is necessary to treat specific strains of malaria with appropriate drugs, and it may take several attempts to find the suitable medication, in order to cure malaria. If mixed infections of malaria are present it may take further treatment in order to eradicate the parasite, as certain types of malaria can lie dormant and flare up several months later.

### **Anti malaria tablets need only be taken in a malaria zone**

**NOT TRUE.** If medication is stopped before the malaria parasites reach the blood cells (usually 10-14 days AFTER being bitten) there will not be enough medication in the bloodstream to kill the parasites.

It is very important to take the medication for 4 weeks after leaving a malaria area.

### **I wasn't bitten, can I stop taking my tablets?**

**NO.** The mosquito that transmits malaria is also known as "The silent killer". The female mosquito does not Buzz around and you may not be aware of her presence. The reaction to bites is not as remarkable as with other insects....and you may not realise you have been bitten at all!

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### **"DID YOU KNOW ?**

The number of cases of imported Malaria to the UK averages 2,000 per year. Half the cases are due to the potentially fatal Falciparum malaria. ALSO - an average of 7 people DIE each year in the UK from Malaria!"

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**The Information contained within these pages is referenced from and with thanks to:**

World Health Organisation - information for International Travel and Health.

CDC - Travel Health information.

WHO - Travel Health Information.

RBM - "Roll Back Malaria" campaign.

British Travel Health Association - Travel wise.

PHLS - CDR Review - Prevention of Malaria in travellers from the UK.

British Airways Travel Information.