

# Stay Healthy When you Travel

By Norman Bizon, PA-C - TravelBug Health



**S**o, your kids are off to college and you finally have the chance to take that trip you've been dreaming about for so long.

Maybe your business is outsourcing and you need to travel to India or China.

Spending a semester overseas for study or work experience? Going on a humanitarian mission?

Our global economy has opened up the world for us to discover and worldwide travel continues to be a steady growth industry. In 2010, there were close to a billion tourist arrivals worldwide. More Americans are traveling overseas, and more than 60% of U.S. travelers' destinations were developing countries. According to the CDC, 30-60% of American travelers, estimated at greater than 10 million people, become ill as a result of their travel. Fortunately, there are many steps you can take to prevent illness and ensure your health and safety when traveling.

## The Pre-Travel Health Visit

Whether you're going on an African safari or a business trip to Thailand, preparation is paramount to a safe and successful trip. All travelers should become informed about the potential hazards of the countries they are traveling to and learn how to minimize any risk to their health. The best way to be safe is to schedule a pre-travel consultation with a certified travel medicine specialist. A consultation includes a review of your medical history and an evaluation of the health risks specific to your destination and activities. Your travel health specialist can advise you on which vaccines you should have and provide you with prescriptions for medications to prevent and treat illnesses such as malaria and travelers' diarrhea.



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Call (480) 435-2774 to schedule a comprehensive pre-travel consultation.

[www.TravelBugHealth.com](http://www.TravelBugHealth.com)



## Immunizations

First, make sure your routine vaccinations (such as MMR, polio and chicken pox) are up-to-date. These vaccines protect you from diseases that are still common in many parts of the world. Get a Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis) vaccine if you haven't had a tetanus booster in the last 5 years, and a flu shot if appropriate. You may need additional vaccines, such as Hepatitis A and B depending on your destination or activities. Some travel vaccines, such as typhoid or Japanese encephalitis may only be available in a travel clinic. If your itinerary includes travel in South America or Africa, you could be prevented from entering your destination country without a Yellow Fever vaccine, which requires an official certification.



### Safe Food and Water

Most people know that you "don't drink the water" when you're overseas. Travelers' diarrhea, often called "Montezuma's revenge", is the most common travel related illness and is caused by bacteria, viruses or spores in untreated water or contaminated food. Make sure you drink only commercial (sealed) bottled or boiled water and don't use ice cubes which are often made with tap water. Avoid street vendors, stick to hot cooked meals, and only eat fresh fruit or vegetables that you can peel yourself.

### Malaria and Insect Bite Prevention

Fortunately we don't have many mosquitoes in Arizona, but in tropical climates insects can transmit a host of diseases and parasites, including malaria, Dengue and Yellow Fever. The first step in preventing these illnesses is to avoid getting bit. Wear long pants and sleeves and use insect repellent containing DEET. Sleep in an air-conditioned or well-screened room or use a bednet. Talk to your travel medicine specialist about taking an antimalarial medication if you are traveling to an area where malaria is a risk.

### Avoid Injuries

Statistically, your biggest risk of serious illness when traveling is from a pre-existing health condition or an injury. Practice common sense and don't take unnecessary risks. Limit alcohol intake and don't drink and drive. Motor vehicle accidents are more common in developing countries and more likely to result in serious injury or death. Always wear a seatbelt, if one is available, and avoid traveling after dark or on overloaded buses or mini-buses. When possible, hire a local driver. If you are doing adventure activities, wear protective gear, such as helmets and life jackets and use caution around water. Lastly, consider purchasing medical evacuation insurance, which will ensure your transport to safety or to get medical care in the event of an emergency or disaster.

"The journey of a thousand miles  
begins with a single step"

~ Lao Tzu ~

### Other Health Tips

- Do not approach any strange animals, including dogs or cats, which could carry rabies.
- To avoid certain parasitic infections, avoid walking barefoot, and don't swim in fresh water lakes or streams.
- Stay well hydrated and wear sunscreen, especially in the tropics and at high altitudes.
- If you are traveling to mountainous regions, such as the Highlands of Peru or Nepal, take precautions to prevent altitude sickness.

### Where to get reliable travel health information

You can find a wealth of information on the Centers for Disease Control travel website at <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/>. The website includes up to date notices on disease outbreaks around the world, and lists recommended vaccines and health risks specific to each country. The CDC also recommends that you see a health-care provider who specializes in Travel Medicine. To have the most benefit, schedule a visit at least 4-6 weeks prior to departure to allow time for vaccines you may need to take effect. Also, bring any prior immunization records with you to your appointment

A pre-travel health consultation is an investment in your peace of mind and the benefits may last you for life. Taking a few precautions and being informed of your risks will help to ensure that you bring back only pleasant memories from your trip of a lifetime. *Be healthy and travel safe!*