

## Health Advice for Travellers

### Before you travel

- When planning your trip, it's important to think of ways to stay healthy while travelling.
- Get the necessary immunizations *before* you travel. You should visit a travel clinic at least six to eight weeks prior to travel to ensure enough time to get necessary immunizations. This is especially important if you live in a rural area where all the vaccines you need may not be available immediately. If you will be moving to another country or travelling for more than three months, you should visit your local public health unit or doctor well in advance.
- Buy a sunscreen with a sun protection factor or SPF of 15 or higher. Test some on your skin. If your skin turns red or burns, try a different sunscreen.
- Purchase medical insurance before you travel.
- Make or buy a first aid kit for common concerns, including pain medication, cold remedies, antihistamines, tweezers, scissors, bandages, mosquito repellent, and medication to help prevent and treat diarrhea.
- Have a dental checkup before you travel.
- Consider taking an extra pair of glasses or contact lenses, plus a written prescription from your eye care practitioner.
- If you have an ongoing health problem, discuss your travel plans with your doctor. Carry a medical aid kit containing prescription medications, needles and syringes. Take also a letter from your doctor stating your medical history and prescribed medications.

### When you travel

- Get plenty of sleep before you leave for your destination.
- If you suffer from motion sickness, and plan to travel by plane, sit in a seat above the wing and move your head as little as possible. You may want to take an anti-nausea medication to prevent and relieve the symptoms.

- Wear loose, comfortable shoes and clothing.
- During your travels, drink plenty of water and/or juice to avoid dehydration.
- Avoid alcohol and drinks with caffeine when flying or travelling by other methods. Eat light meals.
- Walk around and stretch your legs to help improve circulation.
- When you arrive at your destination, try to eat and sleep according to local time.

### Sun protection

- To avoid skin and eye damage that can be caused by the sun, wear clothing that covers your skin, a hat with a wide brim, and sunglasses with Ultra Violet or UV protection.
- Apply a sunscreen with a sun protection factor or SPF of 15 or higher about 15-30 minutes before going out into the sun. Apply the sunscreen according to the instructions on the label.
- Avoid or limit your time in the sun between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. The sun's rays are stronger at high altitudes and are stronger when reflected from snow, water and sand.

### Injury prevention

- Wear closed shoes to prevent getting cuts or wounds, insect or snake bites, and infection from parasites.
- Be very careful when driving in a foreign country and on unfamiliar roads. Use your seat belts. Don't drink and drive. Be sure to use common sense and caution.

### Safe sex

- Avoid sexual contact with multiple partners, partners you don't know well, prostitutes or other persons with many partners. Avoid sexual contact with anyone who has a genital discharge, genital warts or sores.

- Always use a condom for sexual intercourse. Although condoms cannot prevent every case of HIV, hepatitis B, or other sexually transmitted diseases, they can lower the risk of getting these diseases.
- Women should use diaphragms and spermicide, and *also insist* that their male partners use condoms.

### Animal bites

- Rabies is more common in tropical countries. It is spread by bites from rabies-infected domestic and wild animals.
- Do not pet or feed dogs, cats, or other domestic animals. Avoid contact with all wild animals, including monkeys.
- If bitten, immediately cleanse the wound with soap and clean water, and consult local health authorities regarding the possible need for rabies vaccination.

### Swimming

- Wade or swim only in pools filled with clean, disinfected water.
- Don't swim in tropical waters, streams, canals or lakes. These may be infested with disease-causing parasites.
- Don't swim in the ocean if it is close to sewage outlets or freshwater streams.

### Preventing insect-borne diseases

- Insect bites, particularly in the tropics, can spread diseases such as dengue fever, malaria, yellow fever and Japanese encephalitis.
- Carry and use a mosquito repellent. See BC HealthFile [#41f Malaria](#) for more information on mosquito repellents, and tips on how to avoid mosquito bites.

### Food and Water Safety

- Eat foods that are well cooked. Never eat leftovers or food that has been sitting for a long time or not properly stored. Don't eat food sold by street vendors.
- Drink bottled water, bottled drinks, or beverages made with boiled water. Always avoid ice and tap water.
- Make sure dairy products such as milk, cheese, or yogurt are pasteurized and properly refrigerated. If in doubt, avoid them.

- Wash and peel your own fruits and vegetables. Discard the produce if the skin is broken or bruised.
- Use bottled or boiled water for brushing teeth.
- Don't eat custards, mousses, mayonnaise, or hollandaise sauce.
- Don't eat raw vegetables, salads, lettuce, or fruits that cannot be peeled, such as grapes or strawberries.
- Don't eat undercooked or raw meat, fish or shellfish.
- Don't eat watermelon – it may have been injected with local water to increase weight.

Make your motto: *"Cook it, peel it, or leave it!"*

### For more information

To help with travel planning, you may find the following BC HealthFiles helpful:

[#41b The Traveller and Sexually Transmitted Diseases](#)

[#41c International Travel Immunizations for Adults](#)

[#41d Travelling with Infants and Children](#)

[#41e Traveller's Diarrhea](#)

[#41g The Pregnant Traveller](#)

[#41h Japanese Encephalitis](#)

[#41i Yellow Fever](#)

[#41j Typhoid](#)

[#41k Dukoral Vaccine for Traveller's Diarrhea and Cholera](#)

**For more BC HealthFile topics visit [www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/index.stm](http://www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/index.stm), or visit your local public health unit.**

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- In Greater Vancouver, call 604-215-4700
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- Deaf and hearing-impaired, call 1-866-889-4700
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