

Travel Advice for International Travellers

Don't let your holiday or travel be affected by sickness acquired while away or on return. For all travellers (regardless of destination) the following are sensible precautionary recommendations:

Handwashing

If hands aren't clean they can spread bacteria and viruses. But a quick rinse won't make sure they're really clean. So it's important for you to know how to wash your hands properly. You should spend at least 20 seconds washing your hands to ensure they are clean.

Eating and drinking

Only eat food that has been cooked all the way through or fruits and vegetables that have been washed and peeled. Remember: **boil it, cook it, peel it, or don't eat it.**

Only drink water or other drinks from sources you trust. In some countries tap water (which may also be used for ice) is not recommended for consumption and bottled or boiled water is recommended.

Avoidance of insect bites

Depending on what part of the world you are in, mosquitoes can spread **malaria**, **yellow fever**, **dengue**, Japanese B encephalitis, and **West Nile virus**, in addition to other infections. Sandflies spread leishmaniasis and tsetse flies spread sleeping sickness. Ticks can spread **Lyme disease**, as well as other infections.

If you are at risk of biting insects (e.g. mosquitoes, ticks, sandflies) remember to cover up exposed skin areas (with loose clothes) use an insect repellent, and avoid unnecessary exposures if possible.

Many travellers are familiar with the most common biting insect - mosquitoes. Mosquitos bite at any time of day but most bites occur in the evening.

Tips on how to avoid mosquito bites:

- **Time:** Take particular care at times when mosquitoes are most likely to bite: dusk and dawn and from April until October.
- **Risky Areas:** Avoid areas where mosquitoes are likely to be found, i.e. near water including ponds, outdoor swimming pools, lakes and marshes.
- **Use Mosquito Repellents:** Spray onto exposed skin whenever you are in an area where mosquitoes may be present.
- **Dress Safely:** If in areas where mosquitoes are likely, wear long sleeves, long trousers, socks and closed shoes to minimise skin exposure.
- **Indoors:** mosquito bites can be reduced by air conditioning, insect-proof screens on windows and doors and spraying the room with insecticide.
- **Mosquito Nets:** Bed nets and cot nets treated with insect repellent containing DEET or permethrin can be used if necessary.
- **Day Biting:** Some day-biting mosquitoes also transmit infections, so reducing bites at any time is a sensible precaution.

Taking these simple measures will also help to protect you against other mosquito-borne diseases, which are may be encountered while travelling to destinations outside of Ireland.

Other behaviours that might put you at risk

- Casual sex. Condoms provide some protection, but not complete.
- Injection drug use. Never share needles or equipment.
- Other exposures such as ear piercing, tattooing, acupuncture, manicure and shaving with open razors should be avoided unless you are absolutely certain that the equipment being used is sterile.

Traveller's Diarrhoea

Traveller's diarrhoea (TD) is one of the commonest complaints in people travelling abroad, with as many as half of travellers being affected. It is caused by consumption of food or water contaminated by human faeces. Particularly risky foods include raw or undercooked meat, poultry, seafood, raw fruits and vegetables. The primary pathogens responsible for TD include E. Coli, Salmonella, Campylobacter, Shigella, Rotavirus and Giardia. Viruses are another common cause. TD is a self limiting condition and symptoms generally resolve within 3 to 5 days. If diarrhoea continues longer than two weeks this suggests that the underlying cause is parasitic.

It is important to eat food that is fully cooked. Any fruit and vegetables should be peeled before eating.

Much of the time, the greatest risk comes from local water. When travelling to another country, particularly a poorer or less developed country remember that the treatment of water to make it safe to drink may well be a lot less that we are used to at home and in many instances water may not have been treated at all. Tap water therefore should avoided where possible. This means not drinking water from bathroom or bar taps in hotels and lodging houses, using bottled water to brush teeth and ensuring that you pay particular attention to children and elderly people. Safe drinks include bottled carbonated drinks (such as sodas), beer, wine, hot coffee or tea, or water boiled and appropriately treated with iodine tablets.

Since certain parts of the world are associated with particular diseases. More specific travel advice, including vaccinations, and other preventive measures, can be obtained from your GP or your local travel clinic.

Information courtesy of the Health Protection Surveillance Centre.