

Safe travels: Good planning is your passport to health

By Teddi Dineley Johnson

Your bags are packed, you've stopped the mail and you just dropped the dog off at the kennel. You're about to embark on a much-anticipated getaway and you're sure you've thought of everything. But have you? From vaccines to germs on airplanes, travel today is far more complicated than in bygone days, when Dad strapped the suitcases on the roof of the station wagon and everyone piled in. Staying healthy and safe while traveling is important and preparations should start weeks before you leave.

"Unfortunately, nowadays travel is not stress free," says Phyllis Kozarsky, MD, a professor of medicine and infectious diseases at Emory University and a consultant on travel for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Preparation can take much of the stress out of travel, as can simple habits like frequent handwashing, which is always one of the best ways to protect yourself from infection.

Travel is as much an American way of life as football. Whether cruising by car to visit family in the next county for the weekend or flying to Fiji, good planning can be your passport to health and safety.

Jetsetting and your health

According to CDC, about 14 percent of U.S. adults spent at least one night outside the United States in 2007, and there were more than 64 million trips outside the country.

Before you buckle up for takeoff, check out CDC's traveler's health Web site at www.cdc.gov/travel. The site has destination-specific pages and

news on necessary vaccines and disease outbreaks in any country in the world. In addition, CDC advises that you check with your health insurance provider to make sure you'll be covered if you become ill or injured on your trip.

It's recommended that you register your overseas travel with the U.S. Department of State before you set out on your journey. The free service will give you the peace of mind in knowing that you can be contacted in case of an emergency. Also, in the event of a natural disaster, such as an earthquake, hurricane or tidal wave, U.S. authorities will know where you are and will be better able to assist you. For more information, see <https://travelregistration.state.gov>.

If your destination requires immunizations, health travel experts recommend you make an appointment with your health care provider four to six weeks before your trip. Vaccines can take time to become effective, and some immunizations must be given in a series. Check with your local health department too, as it may provide the shots or medicines you'll need for your trip. And while you're rolling up your sleeve, ask your health care provider about other ways to protect your health while traveling.

Be prepared for a bit of jet lag if you fly across three or more time zones. It's very common, and happens because it takes time for your body's "clock" to adjust to the new desti-



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>> **Fact:** Americans took more than 64 million trips outside the country in 2007. Make sure that you are ready for yours.

nation's time. When traveling, daily rhythms of sleep and wakefulness can become out of sync with your new environment.

Exposing yourself to outdoor light as soon as possible can help speed up your body's adjustment to a new time zone.

Pack a travel health kit

In general, whether you travel overseas or to the next state, it's always a good idea to pack a travel health kit that contains general first aid items and your prescription medications. And pack extra prescription medications. If you're going away for two days, don't just bring two pills. Bring the whole bottle, because you might decide to stay longer, or you might get stuck.

To assemble your kit, walk up and down the aisles of your favorite pharmacy and think about what you might need if you have a minor illness while traveling. If you tend to get migraines, for example, be prepared so that you don't find yourself in a hotel room at 11 p.m. with a raging headache and no over-the-counter pain medication.

Your kit should also include alcohol-based hand sanitizer, bandages and antibiotic ointment. Also, pack an extra pair of prescription glasses or contact lenses, your health insurance card, medical health history, laxatives and anti-diarrheal medication.



Pack your common sense

When people are on vacation, they tend to relax the rules a bit, Phyllis Kozarsky of Emory says.

"Things they might not do at home, they will do when traveling, like riding motorbikes without helmets," she says, noting that people tend to drink more while traveling, engage in casual and unprotected sex or get tattoos and piercings without considering the risks of disease.

Even though you are away from home, it doesn't mean that it's okay to ignore health and safety. You may be taking a vacation from your life, but don't take a vacation from common sense.



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>> For more healthy travel tips, visit www.cdc.gov/travel

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