

# Travel well

Millions of Britons travel abroad every year. Many trips pass without incident. However, you should not be complacent about the risks involved with travelling overseas.

## Before you go anywhere, go for expert advice

There is no such thing as risk free travel. To be prepared in case things go wrong, it is important to take a few simple precautions before you go and while you are there.

Visit your GP surgery or travel health clinic/pharmacist 6-8 weeks before travelling for personal, up-to-date, expert advice. You may need a course of vaccinations and medications, which can take several weeks

to complete to ensure that you have adequate protection.

If you take any medicines regularly, make sure you have enough for your trip and check with your airline about what you can carry in your hand luggage. Be aware that some medicines may not be permitted in your destination country. Seek advice from your healthcare professional or the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) website.



## Reduce the risk of accidents

- Avoid alcohol and eating before swimming
- Never dive into water where you are uncertain of the depth
- Swim safely, assess currents, risk of sharks and jellyfish etc
- Never drink and drive
- If you're hiring a vehicle, try to avoid motorcycles or mopeds
- Only use reliable taxi firms and identify the location of emergency facilities

## Take out insurance

Take out medical insurance. Ensure it covers you for repatriation. Make sure you declare any existing health issues. If you are travelling within the EU, apply for a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). This card may entitle you to free emergency medical care within any EU country.

## Now wash your hands!

Contaminated food and drinking water are the most common source of illness abroad.<sup>1</sup>

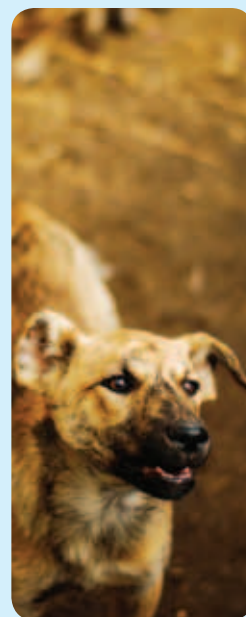
So always wash your hands before eating or preparing food. If you contract diarrhoea, drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated. There are medicines available for treating diarrhoea but you should seek medical advice before taking them.

Reference:

1. World Health Organization. Preventing Travellers' Diarrhoea: How to Make Drinking Water Safe. WHO/SDE/WSH/05.07. Geneva 2005. Available at: [http://www.who.int/water\\_sanitation\\_health/hygiene/envsan/sdwtravel.pdf](http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/hygiene/envsan/sdwtravel.pdf)  
Last accessed March 2011.

## Rabies

Rabies is still present in many parts of the world. If a person develops rabies, death is almost 100% certain.



### Protection against rabies

- Do not approach any animal, including cats and dogs
- If you are scratched or bitten by an animal, or licked on broken skin, wash the wound immediately and thoroughly with soap and running water for at least 5 minutes. Then apply an antiseptic solution
- Seek medical advice immediately, even if you have been previously vaccinated against rabies

## Reduce the risk of food-borne diseases



- Only eat well-cooked fresh food
- Avoid leftovers and reheated foods
- Ensure meat is thoroughly cooked
- Avoid salads
- Only eat fruit that needs to be peeled
- Avoid unpasteurised dairy products including ice-cream
- Avoid high-risk foods such as shellfish
- Don't consume food sold by street vendors



## What about water

Diseases like hepatitis A, typhoid and cholera can be caught from contaminated water.

### Reduce the risk of water-borne diseases

- Unless you know a water supply is safe, only use bottled water, provided in sealed, tamper-proof containers and bottled by known brands; boiled or sterilised water (even for cleaning your teeth)
- Freezing does not sterilise water, so avoid drinks with ice cubes





## Reduce the risk of contracting Hepatitis B or HIV

Hepatitis B and HIV are very serious illnesses. They are usually transmitted through contact with blood or bodily fluids. Use of unclean medical equipment, sharing needles, and **unprotected sex** all increase the risk of contracting hepatitis B or HIV.

### To protect against blood-borne diseases:

- Take a sterile medical kit with you. It should include needles and syringes
- Avoid anything that will break the skin, e.g. ear and body piercing, tattooing and acupuncture

## Don't get bitten

Insect bites can cause many different diseases, including dengue fever, and malaria. Malaria is one of the most serious diseases travellers can be exposed to. A course of antimalarial tablets and employing a few basic protective measures can decrease your risk of contracting this potentially life threatening disease.

## The ABCD of malaria protection

- Be **Aware** of the risk, the incubation period and the main symptoms
- Avoid being **Bitten** by mosquitoes, especially between dusk and dawn
- Take antimalarial drugs (**Chemoprophylaxis**) to suppress infection where appropriate
- Immediately seek **Diagnosis** and treatment if a fever develops one week or more after entering an area where there is a malaria risk, and up to 1 year after departure

## Cover up and practice safe sun

Overexposure to the sun ruins thousands of holidays every year. Sunburn and heat-stroke can be very serious.

### Protection against the sun

- Avoid direct sunshine between 11am – 3pm. This is when the sun is at its strongest
- Use high factor 'SPF' sun cream
- Wear protective clothing. This is particularly important for children, those with pale skin and/or ginger hair
- Drink plenty of fluids and be aware that alcohol can make you dehydrated



## Protection against insect bites

- Spray your clothes and exposed skin with insect repellent. A content of up to 50% DEET is recommended for tropical destinations
- Close room shutter screens early in the evening and spray rooms with insect repellent
- Always sleep under a mosquito net which has been impregnated with a suitable insecticide
- Don't camp near stagnant water. This is a common breeding area for mosquitoes
- Use electronic insecticide vaporisers. However, do be aware of the risk of power failures
- Take antimalarial tablets. It's essential that you complete the course to ensure maximum protection



## Useful websites for further information

For more information and to apply for a European Health Insurance Card visit [www.nhs-direct.org.uk](http://www.nhs-direct.org.uk)

A useful website with more information on your destination provided by the Health Protection Agency (HPA).

[www.nathnac.org](http://www.nathnac.org)

A useful website with more information on your destination provided by the NHS (Scotland).

[www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk](http://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk)

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office website which provides up-to-date information about destination countries.

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/>

Essential advice for anyone travelling to malaria hotspots.

[www.malariahotspots.co.uk](http://www.malariahotspots.co.uk) (this is a GlaxoSmithKline website)

Advice and protection about sunburn and skin cancer.

[www.sunsmart.org.uk](http://www.sunsmart.org.uk)

A comprehensive, up-to-date and accurate source of information on vaccines, disease and immunisation.

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/Travel-immunisation/Pages/Introduction.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Travel-immunisation/Pages/Introduction.aspx)