

Basic Protective Measures

Many travel-related health and safety problems can be significantly reduced through appropriate behavior by the traveler. Risk can be minimized by adherence to the following measures.

Health

Insect Precautions

- Wear clothing that covers as much skin as practicable.
- Apply a repellent to all exposed, nonsensitive areas of the body. Frequent application ensures continuous protection. When both an insect repellent and sunscreen are used, apply the sunscreen first, let it dry completely, then apply the repellent. Very limited data suggest that DEET-containing repellents reduce a sunscreen's stated SPF UVB protection by as much as one-third, requiring more frequent sunscreen application. Sunscreens do not appear to reduce the efficacy of insect repellents (DEET or picaridin) but may increase the absorption of DEET (but not picaridin) through the skin, even when the sunscreen is applied first as recommended. Never use a combination sunscreen/insect repellent product (e.g., Avon Skin Soft Bug Guard, Bull Frog Mosquito Coast Sunscreen with Insect Repellent, or Sunsect).
- Use a repellent containing DEET (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide; 30%–35% concentration) or, alternatively, a repellent containing picaridin (20% concentration or greater for tropical destinations; also known as icaridin). Picaridin, unlike DEET, has a pleasant smell and does not dissolve plastic materials.
- Determine the time of day and type of insects to be avoided when choosing when to apply repellent.
 - *Applicable to malaria risk countries:* Mosquitoes that transmit malaria (*Anopheles* spp.) are generally night biters with activity between dusk and dawn.
 - *Applicable to West Nile virus and Japanese encephalitis risk countries:* Mosquitoes that transmit these diseases (*Culex* spp.) are generally night biters but have peak activity at dusk and again at dawn.
 - *Applicable to chikungunya, dengue, yellow fever, or Zika risk countries:* Mosquitoes that transmit these diseases (*Aedes* spp.) can bite throughout the day but have peak activity during early morning and late afternoon and evening.
 - *Applicable to leishmaniasis risk countries:* Sandflies that transmit leishmaniasis are active from dusk to dawn, but in forests and dark rooms they may bite during the daytime if disturbed.
 - *Applicable to African trypanosomiasis risk countries:* DEET is generally ineffective. Wear light-colored (not blue), heavyweight clothing in risk areas.
- Treat outer clothing, boots, tents, and sleeping bag liners with permethrin (or other pyrethroid) when traveling in an area of very high risk for mosquito-borne or tick-borne diseases.
- Sleep under a permethrin-impregnated bed net when at high risk of malaria or Japanese encephalitis if not sleeping in a sealed, air-conditioned room. Regularly check the net for rips and tears and keep it tucked in around the bed at all times. Ensure that all open windows have insect screens.
- Use spatial repellent products in the form of an aerosol spray, vaporizer device, or smoldering coil. These products usually contain a pyrethroid (e.g., metofluthrin or allethrin).
- Perform a full body check for ticks at least once a day when staying in areas where tick-borne disease is a risk.

Safe Food and Beverages

- Wash hands with soap before eating and after using the toilet. If water is not available, use disposable antiseptic wipes or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid food from street vendors or market stalls.
- Choose establishments that are known to cater to foreigners.
- Avoid buffets if food covers or fly controls are not used or foods have not been kept steaming hot.
- Avoid undercooked meat, seafood, and fish; unpasteurized dairy products, such as cheese, yogurt, and milk; creamy desserts; cold sauces such as mayonnaise, salad dressing, and salsas; and leafy or uncooked vegetables and salads.
- Eat well-cooked, steaming-hot foods. Other foods that are safer to eat include breads, tortillas, crackers, biscuits, and other baked goods as well as canned foods and fruits, nuts, and vegetables with thick skins, peels or shells that can be removed.
- Avoid tap water or anything mixed with tap water and do not rinse toothbrushes in tap water.
- Do not use ice unless it is made from boiled, bottled, or purified water. Freezing does not kill the organisms that cause diarrhea.

- Use sealed bottled water or chemically treated, filtered, or boiled water for drinking and making ice and for brushing teeth.
- Drink canned, boxed, or commercially bottled carbonated water and drinks. Beer and wine are safe to drink; however, alcohol added to other beverages does not render the beverages safe.
- Purify water if one of these options is not available (see *Treating Water*). Decide which method to use for water purification and bring along the appropriate equipment or chemicals. Do not assume that water is safe because it is chlorinated. Chlorination does not destroy all the organisms that can cause illness.
- Continue to breastfeed infants who are nursing because it is the safest food source for these infants. If formula is used for feeding infants, prepare with boiled water and sterilized containers.

Blood-Borne and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

- Use condoms in all sexual encounters; unprotected casual sex, whether with local residents or with fellow travelers, always poses a high risk.
- Understand that inhibitions are diminished when traveling away from the social constraints of home; excessive use of alcohol and recreational drugs can influence behavior and encourage unintentional risk exposure.
- Avoid sexual relations with commercial sex workers.
- Consider short-term HIV preexposure prophylaxis with Truvada if very high-risk sexual behaviors are anticipated.
- Avoid skin-perforating procedures (acupuncture, piercing, or tattooing).
- Avoid invasive medical or dental procedures in unaccredited medical facilities (unless in a life-threatening situation); request proof of accreditation by Joint Commission International or other international bodies.
- Consider carrying disposable needles, syringes, and sutures for remote travel.

Swimming and Water Exposure

- Heed posted warnings and avoid beaches that are not patrolled.
- Recognize rip currents as a calm area with flat sandy water in front of the beach where the waves are not breaking and a line of white foam moves steadily seaward. Stay afloat, wave and yell for help, and swim parallel to the shore. Do not swim directly against the current in an attempt to get immediately back to shore; doing so may lead to exhaustion and drowning.
- Do not swim alone or after dark and do not walk on any beach after dark.
- Avoid use of alcohol or mind-altering drugs while engaging in water sports. Avoid water where sewage contamination or algae are present. Avoid any exposure (rafting, swimming, or wading) in water known to be infected with schistosomiasis (bilharzia).
- Scuba dive only with personnel certified by the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) or the National Association of Underwater Instructors (NAUI); use equipment only from PADI- or NAUI-certified dive operators.
- Follow established timetables for air travel after diving. The time from the end of the dive until the boarding of an aircraft is generally between 12 and 24 hours, depending on the type of dive.
- Decline water transportation in vessels without personal flotation devices or life jackets.
- Wear appropriate footwear when walking, wading, or swimming to avoid injury and exposure to parasites and poisonous plants and animals.
- Consider leptospirosis prophylaxis with 200 mg of doxycycline once per week (or 100 mg per day if in use for concomitant malaria prophylaxis) in developing countries where substantial risk of leptospirosis exists due to activities with exposure to water or wet environments (e.g., hikers, bikers, or adventurer travelers).
- Sit on a towel, blanket, or piece of clothing if a chair or hammock is not available because sand may be contaminated in areas frequented by animals. Thoroughly shake out all fabrics after use.
- Avoid eating amberjack, bonito, mackerel, mahi-mahi, or tuna due to risk of scombroid poisoning.

Rabies

- Never assume that an animal or bat is free of rabies.
- Avoid entering caves due to the possibility of exposure to bats and their droppings.
- Do not handle or feed pets, unknown animals (especially dogs and monkeys), or bats. Children should be closely supervised.
- Clean any bite, scratch, or lick on broken skin immediately with soapy water; seek postexposure prophylaxis for rabies (even if rabies vaccine was completed before exposure) or herpes B virus (transmitted by monkey bites).
- Minimize running or bicycling in high-risk rabies areas to avoid provoking domestic animals.

Skin/Wound Care

Extra vigilance, as outlined below, is recommended.

- Clean any bite, cut, or broken skin with safe water. Broken skin may become infected and lead to serious problems. Apply an antiseptic solution or spray.
- Seek medical help if increasing pain, redness, or discharge from a wound occurs, which suggests a spreading infection and may require antibiotic treatment.
- Always wear hats and apply sunscreen in the tropics. When both an insect repellent and sunscreen are used, apply the sunscreen first, let it dry completely, then apply the repellent. Very limited data suggest that DEET-containing repellents reduce a sunscreen's stated SPF UVB protection by as much as one-third, requiring more frequent sunscreen application. Sunscreens do not appear to reduce the efficacy of insect repellents (DEET or picaridin) but may increase the absorption of DEET (but not picaridin) through the skin, even when the sunscreen is applied first as recommended. Never use a combination sunscreen/insect repellent product (e.g., Avon Skin Soft Bug Guard, Bull Frog Mosquito Coast Sunscreen with Insect Repellent, or Sunsect).
- *Applicable only to African countries:* Iron all clothes that have been dried outdoors to prevent skin infestation by the larvae of the tumbu fly.

Tuberculosis

- Practice hand hygiene diligently.
- Avoid crowded public transportation or crowded public places that are poorly ventilated.
- Move away from anyone with a persistent or intense cough.
- Screen domestic workers for tuberculosis.
- Have a tuberculosis skin test or tuberculosis blood test before departure, once per year thereafter, and upon returning home (if planning a long stay to areas of the world where TB is highly or moderately endemic).

Pretravel Checklist

- Have predeparture medical and dental exams.
- Express any concerns about jet lag, altitude illness, or motion sickness to a travel health provider, who may suggest suitable medications.
- Pack adequate supplies of necessary medications and ensure that they are securely packaged in their original, labeled prescription containers and carried in multiple places. Travelers should have a letter from a physician stating the medical condition and the medications and/or medical supplies being carried.
 - If traveling with a controlled drug for personal use, review medication regulations on the International Narcotics Control Board website (<http://www.incb.org/incb/en/travellers/index.html>) as well as official government sites. Rules on amphetamine-based medications used for attention-deficit/hyperactive disorders should always be checked before travel.
- Prepare a compact medical kit that includes the following: simple first-aid supplies (such as bandages, gauze, hemostatic gauze, antiseptic, antibiotic ointment, butterfly bandages, skin glue, and splinter forceps), a thermometer, antipyretic agents, antifungal creams, cough and cold remedies, antacids, hydrocortisone cream, and blister pads.
- Pack a spare pair of eyeglasses or contact lenses and adequate cleansing solution, if applicable.
- Pack sunglasses, wide-brimmed hats, sunscreen (SPF 30+), and lip protection to avoid sun exposure problems during travel.
- Arrange adequate medical and evacuation insurance when traveling, even for short trips. Ensure all preexisting medical issues are declared to the insurer so that noncovered conditions are ascertained in advance. Have the insurer's contact details recorded and accessible at all times during travel.
- Carry a list of contact information for hometown medical providers, health insurance carriers, and a medical assistance company, keeping it accessible at all times.
- Carry a list of medical conditions, allergies, and medications (with dosages).
- Carry a copy of a recent electrocardiogram on a portable USB drive or ensure that it can be accessed on the internet (for those with cardiac disease).

Safety

Safety and Crime Avoidance

Extra vigilance, as outlined below, is recommended.

- Use caution in tourist sites and crowded areas and on or near public transportation; avoid marginal areas of cities.
- Be wary of any stranger who initiates conversation or physical contact in any way, no matter how accidental it may seem.
- Be familiar with common local scams and distraction techniques.
- Avoid using ATMs at night.

- Minimize visible signs of wealth in dress or jewelry.
- Wear handbags across the chest to prevent theft.
- Give up valuables if confronted. Money and passports can be replaced; life cannot.
- Use taxis from official ranks or dispatched via smart phone app or radio from a reputable company.
- Carry only a photocopy of the passport face page and legal entry stamp unless otherwise required by authorities; leave the actual passport in a hotel safe or other safe place.
- Advise at least 1 other person of one's whereabouts and expected schedule.
- Register a foreign trip and residence information with the Department of State at travelregistration.state.gov (U.S. citizens only), which facilitates communication and assistance in case of an emergency.

Safety in the Hotel

- Keep hotel doors locked at all times.
- Seek out and read fire safety instructions in the hotel room. Become familiar with escape routes upon arrival.
- Keep valuables in the room safe or the hotel safe.

Safety while Driving

- Do not drink and drive.
- Avoid overcrowded transportation.
- Keep automobile doors locked and windows closed at all times, if possible.
- Seek vehicles with seat belts, which may result in extra expense; decline vehicles without seat belts unless no choice is available.
- Decline transportation in vehicles with worn tires, worn brakes, or inoperative lights.
- Avoid driving at night or alone; seek local advice before driving outside urban areas after dark.
- Never drive a motorcycle or scooter abroad; passengers should wear a helmet.
- If planning a long stay, arrange for local mobile phone service (either a personal phone with a local plan or a locally purchased phone) to be in the vehicle when traveling.

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