



Travel Health



There are health risks, for people of all ages, associated with long distance and overseas travel. Some simple planning and preparation can help a traveller to have a safe and healthy trip.

Deep vein thrombosis (DVT)

A DVT is a blood clot in a deep vein in the leg. It is a serious condition that can develop when sitting or lying still for a long time. Other factors increasing the risk of DVT include:

- Age over 40 years
- Smoking
- Recent surgery or injury
- Pregnancy
- Family history of DVT
- Overweight
- Hormone medicines (e.g., 'the pill')
- Blood clotting disorders
- Certain medical conditions (e.g., heart disease, cancer).

Symptoms include:

- Leg swelling, redness, warmth
- Leg pain or tenderness.

Ways to protect against DVT while travelling include:

- Exercise foot and leg muscles every half hour
- Do not sit cross-legged
- Drink plenty of water and juice. Avoid alcohol and caffeine-containing drinks.

If you have risk factors for DVT, consult a doctor before you travel.

Jet lag

Jet lag is the time it takes for the body 'clock' to get used to the local time in a new place. The degree of jet lag depends on the number of time zones crossed and direction of travel. Jet lag usually lasts at least a few days.

Symptoms include:

- Irritability
- Poor concentration
- Poor appetite, upset stomach
- Tiredness, disturbed sleep.

Ways to reduce jet lag when flying include:

- Have enough sleep the night before you leave
- Travel westward. Plan a stopover if possible
- Eat light, healthy meals and drink plenty of water
- Limit or avoid alcohol and caffeine
- Wear loose, comfortable clothing
- Try to plan sleep according to the time at your destination. A mild sleeping tablet may help – ask a doctor or pharmacist.

Travellers' diarrhoea (TD)

TD is very common. It is usually caused by eating or drinking contaminated food, water or ice.

Symptoms include:

- Stomach cramps, pain and bloating
- Frequent runny, watery bowel motions
- Nausea, vomiting, fever or bloody bowel motions.

Ways to protect against TD include:

- Drink only boiled, canned, bottled or purified drinks; avoid ice. Purify water with a purifying machine or tablets if necessary
- Avoid anything that might have been washed in local water (e.g., salads). If you can't peel it, cook it or boil it, don't eat it
- Avoid brushing teeth in local water

- Wash your hands before meals and after each toilet visit. Dry your hands with your own towel or let them air dry
- Avoid unpasteurised milk and dairy products
- Avoid shellfish and cold cooked meats.

Ways to treat TD include:

- Drink at least 3 litres of clear fluid daily. Oral rehydration solution is best – ask a doctor or pharmacist
- Rest and eat simple carbohydrate foods
- Antibiotics in severe cases.

Malaria

Malaria is a serious infection spread by infected mosquitoes.

Symptoms include:

- Fever, chills, sweating
- Headache.

Malaria can cause organ failure, coma or death.

Ways to protect against malaria include:

- Use insect repellent containing diethyl toluamide (DEET) on exposed skin and clothing
- Use mosquito nets
- Cover arms, legs and ankles with clothing when outdoors, especially after sunset
- Check if you need medicine to prevent malaria – it will depend on where you are going. Ask a doctor or pharmacist.

Self care

- Visit a doctor and dentist for a check-up at least eight weeks before travelling.
- Ensure immunisations are up-to-date. At least eight weeks before travelling, check if any special vaccinations are needed.
- For 'adventure' holidays, get advice about relevant health issues (e.g., altitude sickness).
- Have eyesight checked; consider taking a spare pair of glasses.
- If you plan to carry medicines overseas, contact the embassy of the country you are visiting, to ensure the medicines are legal there. Carry a letter from your doctor that lists your medicines and doses and states they are for your personal use. Leave medicines in original packaging, so they are labelled with your name and dosage instructions.

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

- Purchase health and travel insurance.
 - Prepare a first-aid kit for the trip. Consider doing a first-aid course.
 - Wear an alert bracelet or necklace if you have a serious health condition or allergy – ask a pharmacist.
 - Use a 30+ sunscreen and lip balm outdoors.
 - Always follow safe sex practices. Take condoms with you rather than buying locally.
- Note:** Diarrhoea and medicines used to treat diarrhoea and malaria can reduce effectiveness of 'the pill'.

Special preparation may be necessary if you are travelling with children, are over 60 years or have an existing medical condition – ask a doctor or pharmacist.

On returning, consult a doctor if you develop:

- Fever or flu-like symptoms
- Diarrhoea that won't go away
- Skin problems (e.g., rash)
- Any unusual symptoms.

Note: Some diseases can take several months to develop.

Related fact cards

- *First Aid*
- *HIV/AIDS*
- *Sense in the Sun*
- *Vomiting & Diarrhoea*

For more information

Australian Dept of Foreign Affairs and Trade – website www.smarttraveller.gov.au

Travellers Medical and Vaccination Centre – phone 1300 658 844 or website www.traveldoctor.com.au

WHO, International Travel and Health – website www.who.int/ith/en/

Travel Clinics Australia – website www.travelclinic.com.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflets – your pharmacist can advise on availability.

NPS Medicines Line – phone 1300 888 763 Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm EST.

The Poisons Information Centre – in case of poisoning phone 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacy Self Care Support – phone 1300 369 772 and ask for the Pharmacy Self Care Field Officer.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

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