This booklet briefly discusses important topics often asked by people traveling abroad. For additional information, please consult the resources listed on the last page of this booklet or call 919-250-3885.

We hope your travels are safe, healthy, and happy!

Wake County Human Services Foreign Travel Staff

**FOOD AND WATER SAFETY**

Contaminated food and drink are the major sources of stomach upset, diarrhea and vomiting while traveling. Many contagious diseases are spread through food and water. Some can also be spread when people who are handling food do not wash their hands well. “Boil it, peel it, cook it, or forget it!” is good advice to follow while traveling, especially in areas where sanitation is poor.

**Food**

Choose food carefully to avoid illness. Raw foods may be contaminated. You can protect yourself by following these simple guidelines:

- Eat foods that have been cooked thoroughly and are still hot.
- Avoid salads.
- Don’t eat fruits and vegetables that cannot be peeled unless they have been cooked. Peel fruits and vegetables yourself. Wash your hands, the knife and the fruit or vegetable with clean water before peeling. Don’t eat the peelings.
- Do not eat raw or undercooked shellfish.
- Avoid unpasteurized milk and milk products such as unpasteurized cheese.
- Avoid food and drinks sold by street vendors. Food and drink from street vendors has been associated with an increased risk of illness.

Breastfeeding is the easiest way to guarantee safe food for an infant. Otherwise, formula made from commercial powder and boiled water is safest and most practical.

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**IMPORTANT INFORMATION TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Pre-travel health information by destination.
1600 Clifton Rd, Atlanta, GA 30333,
Website: [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel)
International Travelers’ Information line:
1-800-232-4636 (1-800-CDC-INFO)

IAMAT –International Association for Medical Assistance to Travelers
Information about immunization requirements for all countries, health risks, and how to get health care when traveling internationally.
1623 Military Rd. #279
Niagara Falls, NY 14304-1745
website: [www.iamat.org](http://www.iamat.org)
Information line: 716-754-4883

U.S. Department of State
Tips on overseas travel, emergency information, passports, visas, etc.
Website: [www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov)
Overseas travel: [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov)
Hotline for American travelers: 202-647-5225

World Health Organization
Provides information on main health risks for international travelers.
Avenue Appia 20
CH-1211 Geneva 27
Switzerland
Website: [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)
General information: email [info@who.int](mailto:info@who.int)
MEDICAL CARE ABROAD

The U.S. State Department provides a free travel registration service to U.S. citizens who are traveling or living abroad. Registration in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) allows you to record information about your upcoming trip that the Department of State can use to help in case of an emergency. The nearest U.S. embassy or consulate can usually give names of hospitals, physicians or emergency medical service agencies.

For more information, visit the U.S. Department of State’s Travel Registration website at https://travelregistration.state.gov

Before leaving, you should contact your own insurance company to learn what medical services your health insurance will cover while living or traveling abroad.

POST TRAVEL PERIOD

Most people who get infections abroad get sick within 6 weeks after returning home. However, symptoms of some diseases may not develop for as long as a year, as can be the case with malaria. You should always tell your doctor if you have traveled during the 12 months before you became sick. This will help the doctor look for illnesses which may not be common in the U.S., but that may be common in the countries where you were traveling.

Water

- Drink water that is bottled, boiled, filtered, or treated with chlorine or iodine.
- Drinks like tea or coffee should be made with boiled water.
- Bottled or carbonated drinks without ice are safe choices. Water found on the tops of beverage cans or bottles may also be contaminated. The area of a can or bottle that will touch the mouth should be cleaned and dried.
- Avoid ice, popsicles, or flavored ices that could be made with untreated water.
- Use bottled, boiled or treated water to brush teeth.

Making Water Safe to Drink

Boiling

Boiling water is the best way to make water safe to drink. Boiling water kills bacteria, viruses, and parasites that cause diarrhea. Bring water to a rolling boil for at least one minute. Do not add ice to cool.

Filtration

Portable water filters may remove some types of disease causing germs from drinking water. However, most of these filters don’t remove viruses well so chemical treatment of the water should be a second step.

Chemical and UV Light Treatment

Water can be treated with iodine or chlorine tablets which can be bought at sporting goods and drug stores. Follow product instructions.

The use of ultraviolet (UV) light is another method that reduces disease causing microorganisms in CLEAR water. UV light will not work if the water is cloudy or turbid.

For more information about water treatment and filters, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at: http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/content/safe-food-water.aspx
Swimming

Generally only chlorinated pools are safe places to swim. Following these guidelines can help you avoid water related illnesses.

- Don’t swallow water when swimming, even in chlorinated pools.
- Avoid beaches that may be contaminated with human sewage or dog feces.
- Do not put your head under water. Swimming in contaminated water can cause skin, eye, ear, or intestinal infections.
- Avoid swimming or wading when you have open cuts or wounds as they allow easy entry of disease-causing germs into the body.
- Avoid wading or swimming in freshwater streams, canals, and lakes. Parasites are likely to be found in freshwater in the tropics and sub-tropical areas of the world.

Health Concerns While Traveling

Traveler’s Diarrhea

Traveler’s diarrhea is the result of eating food or drinking beverages that are contaminated or swimming in contaminated water. Bacteria are responsible for approximately 85% of traveler’s diarrhea cases, parasites about 10%, and viruses 5%.

Symptoms include:
- Diarrhea
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Bloating
- Urgency
- Generally not feeling well.

High Altitudes

Traveling at high altitudes can cause insomnia, headache, nausea, or more serious problems, even in young and healthy people. High altitudes can be particularly dangerous for people with cardiac or pulmonary conditions. The best way to avoid altitude sickness is to move to higher altitudes gradually. There are several medications that have been shown to be useful in the prevention and treatment of altitude sickness. Ask your health care provider for more information.

Blood Clots

The risk of developing a blood clot in the legs increases in people who sit still for long periods in cramped conditions such as during air travel. Symptoms include redness, pain, cramps in the calves and swelling of the leg. Travelers at risk include people with a history of blood clots, people taking oral contraceptives, pregnant women, people who have cancer or restricted mobility. If you are in one of these risk groups you should talk to your doctor before traveling by air.

Drink plenty of fluids, wear loose fitting clothes and get up regularly for a short walk or to stretch your legs.

Injuries

Injuries are the leading cause of preventable deaths in travelers. Motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of injury-related deaths worldwide. Traffic rules may differ around the world, roads may be poor and rules may not be strictly obeyed or enforced. People, horses or other animals, and a variety of vehicles such as bicycles, carts, trucks, and cars of all shapes and sizes may share the same road. Drive and walk defensively to avoid injury.
Stress
International travelers often experience stresses that may lower resistance to disease including:
• Crowding.
• Change in usual eating and drinking habits.
• Time changes that disturb usual patterns of sleeping and wakefulness.

This type of stress can lead to nausea, indigestion, fatigue or insomnia. It may take a week or more to get used to these changes depending on how many time zones are crossed.

Temperature
Excessive heat and humidity may lead to heat exhaustion, heat stroke or hyperthermia. If you are traveling in hot, humid climates you should drink plenty of liquids and seek shade.

Very cold temperatures can lead to hypothermia and frostbite if not properly dressed. Be especially careful with the elderly and babies in cold weather.

Sunburn
Ultraviolet (UV) rays of the sun can cause severe sunburn, especially if you have light skin. Sunburns may be more likely at higher altitudes and at locations closer to the equator. You should protect your skin by:
• Using sunscreen or sun block. Follow product directions.
• Wearing clothing with a tight weave.
• Wearing wide brimmed hats.
• Wearing sunglasses with 100% UV protection that wrap around the face.

Motion Sickness
Travelers with a history of motion or sea sickness can often get relief or prevent symptoms altogether by using one of many products available for motion sickness. Ask your doctor or a pharmacist for a recommendation.

The greatest risk from having traveler’s diarrhea is dehydration, especially for infants, children and adults with chronic medical problems. Prevent dehydration by drinking beverages that are bottled, boiled, filtered or treated. If you have severe dehydration, drink an oral rehydration solution prepared with purified water. These can be found at many stores and pharmacies all over the world.

Traveler’s diarrhea usually goes away after a few days. You should get medical help if:
• Diarrhea is severe or bloody
• Diarrhea is not gone in a few days
• Diarrhea is accompanied by fever and chills
• There is persistent vomiting.

Traveling in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Central and South America increases your risk for getting travelers diarrhea. The risk of infection depends on where you eat. Eating in private homes is the least risky, while eating food sold by street vendors is most risky.

The best way to prevent traveler’s diarrhea is by choosing food and beverages carefully. At this time, preventive antibiotics like Cipro are not recommended for most travelers because they don’t protect against diarrhea caused by viruses and parasites.

Medications such as Lomotil®, Imodium® or Pepto-Bismol® can decrease the number of diarrhea stools. Ask your doctor about preventative therapy and diarrhea treatment before leaving home.

Tuberculosis
Tuberculosis (TB) is a serious health concern in many parts of the world. TB is spread by being in a small space for a long time with a person who is sick with active TB disease. It is spread through the air when someone who has active TB disease of the lungs or throat coughs, sneezes, sings or speaks. If you plan to travel for several months in areas of the world where TB is common, you should consider having a baseline TB skin test before traveling and be re-tested 8-10 weeks after returning.
**Malaria**

Malaria is a blood-borne disease caused by a parasite. Humans get the parasite through the bite of an infected mosquito. Infected mosquitoes are found in most countries in the tropics and subtropics. Each year, malaria causes 350-500 million infections worldwide and approximately 1 million deaths. Mosquitoes may bite at any time, but most often bite during the hours from dusk until dawn.

Symptoms of malaria are similar to the flu including fever, chills, muscle aches and fatigue. These symptoms can develop as early as 7 days after exposure or as late as several months to a year later.

**Prevention of malaria:**

- You should get a prescription for anti-malarial medication and take the medication before, during and after travel as directed.
- Apply insect repellants with DEET to exposed skin. DEET concentrations of 30-50% are effective for several hours. Do not use insect repellants that contain sunscreen. If sunscreen is also needed, apply sunscreen separately as it may need to be reapplied more often than the insect repellant. Follow product instructions.
- Protect infants by using a carrier draped with mosquito netting with an elastic edge for a tight fit.
- Stay inside screened areas from dusk until dawn.
- Wear long pants, long-sleeved shirts and closed shoes when outdoors.
- Use mosquito netting over beds.
- Apply permethrin products to clothing and bed netting. Follow product directions.

**Bed Bugs**

While bed bugs do not transmit disease, they are annoying for travelers. Bed bugs are small, flat, insects that feed on the blood of people while they sleep.

Bed bugs are found around the world. Bed bugs have been found in five-star hotels, hostels and cruise ships. Cleanliness of the sleeping area does not determine where bed bugs will be found.

Bed bugs are experts at hiding. They can hide anywhere you can slide a credit card. Bed bugs are spread from place to place as people travel. They hide in the seams and folds of luggage, computer bags, purses, clothes, linens, etc. Most people do not realize they are transporting bed bugs as they travel from place to place.

To prevent picking up bed bugs while traveling:

- Use a flashlight to inspect the mattress, box springs, headboard and luggage rack for bed bug “marks”. Look for brown or black spots, white eggs and shed bed bug shells. Ask for another room if you see any bed bug “marks”.
- Keep your luggage, bags and clothes off the floor and beds. Put them in the bathroom or on the luggage rack.
- Wash and dry all clothes on high heat when you return home.
- Keep suitcases in the garage or in a sealed plastic bag between trips.
OTHER RISKS DURING TRAVEL

Snakes
Poisonous snakes are found worldwide, although deaths from snakebites are relatively rare. The Australian brown snake, Russell’s viper, cobras in southern Asia, carpet vipers in the Middle East and coral snakes and rattlesnakes in the Americas are particularly dangerous.

Snakes tend to be more active at night and in warm weather. Snakes who are startled or bothered may bite in self-defense. The venom of a small snake may be even more concentrated than that of a larger one, therefore all snakes should be left alone. Wear boots and long pants when walking outdoors in snake-infested regions.

Snakebite victims should be taken for medical treatment. First aid until medical treatment begins includes:
- Not moving the part of the body that was bitten.
- Putting ice on the wound and a pressure bandage that does not limit blood flow.

Insects
The bites, stings and skin contact of some insects can cause unpleasant reactions. Many insects can also spread disease even without the person being aware of the bite. You should be especially careful when camping or spending time outdoors. Insect repellents containing DEET, protective clothing and mosquito netting to cover sleeping areas are recommended in many parts of the world (See Malaria, page 6).

Scorpion bites may be painful but are seldom dangerous. However, some of the most poisonous scorpions are found in Mexico. You should be especially careful if camping or spending time outdoors. Since scorpions are more active at night, sleep under mosquito nets and shake clothing and shoes before putting them on in the morning to avoid bites.

Dengue
Dengue Fever is caused by a virus transmitted by the bite of an infected mosquito. Dengue virus has been increasing in many parts of the tropics and subtropics, including outbreaks in Puerto Rico and as far north as Key West, Florida. Each year, there are over 100 million cases of dengue worldwide.

Unlike malaria, there is no vaccine or medication to prevent dengue, nor is there a medication for treating the disease. This is why it is especially important for travelers to protect themselves from mosquito bites as described on the opposite page under the Prevention of Malaria heading.

If you get symptoms of dengue during travel or in the first two weeks after traveling abroad, you should visit your doctor. Symptoms include:
- High fever
- Severe headache
- Severe eye pain (behind eyes)
- Joint pain, muscle and/or bone pain
- Rash

Dengue can become serious. Go IMMEDIATELY to the closest health care provider if you have any of the following warning signs:
- Severe abdominal pain
- Red spots or patches on the skin
- Bleeding from nose or gums
- Continued vomiting or vomiting blood
- Black, tarry stools
- Drowsiness or irritability
- Pale, cold, or clammy skin
- Difficulty breathing
Tick Borne Diseases
There are several diseases caused by ticks. People who spend time camping, hiking and rafting and people who spend time in rural areas are more likely to be bitten by a tick.

Prevention:
• Avoid areas where ticks live (tall grasses, brushy areas, forests and leaf litter).
• Use insect repellants.
• Wear long sleeved shirts tucked into long pants. Tuck pants into socks.
• Check skin and clothing for ticks everyday.

Ticks rarely spread disease within the first 6-12 hours they are attached. Remove ticks quickly to reduce the chance of getting sick from a tick.

• Use tweezers to firmly grasp the tick.
• Pull the tick upward steadily.
• Wash hands and the bite area with soap and water.
• Make a note of the date you removed the tick.

If you get flu-like symptoms or a rash in the next month, see a doctor and let him know you were bitten by a tick. Diseases caused by ticks can be treated with antibiotics. Early treatment can help shorten the length and severity of illness.

Rabies
Rabies is a serious disease that infects both domestic and wild animals throughout much of the world. The virus that causes rabies is spread to animals and humans through saliva, most commonly through animal bites. Rabies can also be spread by scratches or licks to broken skin and mucous membranes. Once symptoms of the disease develop, rabies is fatal to both animals and humans.

Dogs are the main source of rabies in developing countries. However, all mammals can spread rabies including cats, monkeys, foxes, raccoons, skunks, wolves, and bats.

Travelers who are bicycling, camping, hiking, or spending long periods of time outdoors in rural areas are at risk of contact with animals even if their trip is short. Visitors to caves do not need to be concerned about cave air, but should never handle bats.

Travelers should never pet, handle or feed animals or pets. Young children are more likely to be bitten or scratched and are less likely to report having been bitten.

If bitten or scratched by an animal, you should:
• Immediately wash the area with soap and water.
• See a doctor.
• Report the bite to local health authorities to find out if rabies post-exposure treatment is needed.
• Contact your physician or county health department as soon as possible when you return to the US.

Rabies Pre-exposure Vaccination
Pre-exposure vaccination should be considered for international travelers:
• Who are likely to come in contact with animals in areas where rabies is present.
• When immediate access to appropriate medical care, including vaccines, may be difficult.

Pre-exposure vaccination greatly simplifies, but does not eliminate, the need for post-exposure treatment. Pre-exposure vaccine is a series of 3 shots given over 3-4 weeks and must be completed before leaving home.