



# Travel Vaccinations

**Dr Kwan Yew Seng** has some travel tips for those hoping to avoid nasty bugs and illnesses while on the road.

**B**e it for business or leisure, travelling overseas always entails some health risks. Thankfully, some diseases can be prevented by getting the appropriate vaccinations.

The best time to consult your doctor is roughly 4-6 weeks before departing on your travels – although it's never too late for a medical visit. The appropriate vaccines can still go a long way in preventing nasty travel-related illnesses.

## Are there side effects from the vaccines?

Most vaccines are very well tolerated by the majority of travellers and are not likely to cause them illness. Common side effects are things like pain and redness at the injection site, while some people may experience a slight fever in the few days after the injection.

If you have a history of being allergic to a particular vaccine, or if you have a fever, then your vaccine will not be administered. It is generally alright to go ahead with vaccinations even when you have a mild cold, mild diarrhoea or if you are taking antibiotics for another illness.

Here are some common vaccines available, and the period they are effective:

- **Hepatitis A:** 10-20 years. No booster is recommended after completing two doses.
- **Typhoid:** 2 years
- **Hepatitis B:** For most people with normal immune status, no booster is required.
- **Rabies:** Two doses are required after exposure. Serology may be done in certain situations.
- **Yellow fever:** 10 years
- **Meningococcal:** 3 years
- **Japanese encephalitis:** 2 years
- **Tetanus-diphtheria:** 5 to 10 years
- **Measles, Mumps, Rubella:** Lifetime (after second dose)
- **Varicella (chicken pox):** Lifetime (after second dose)
- **Polio:** Lifetime (after a single adult booster)
- **Influenza:** 6 to 12 months

## Traveller's Diarrhoea

Traveller diarrhoea is the most common illness affecting travellers. It can be caused by many different bacteria, viruses and parasites, many of which are widespread worldwide. Destination is the most important influence on the risk of getting traveller diarrhoea. Going off the beaten track and being more adventurous in food habits will increase the risks.

**Transmission:** Eating and drinking contaminated food and liquids are the main ways of getting infected. Common sources of infection are salads, uncooked/semi-cooked foods, fruits and ice. Food served freshly cooked, hot and on clean crockery carries the lowest risk. Just remember to 'boil it, cook it, peel it, leave it'.

**Treatment:** Drinking and retaining enough safe fluids is the most important part of treatment. If oral rehydration salts are available they can be mixed with clean water to replace

lost electrolytes. Adults can take loperamide to reduce the frequency of diarrhoea, especially during long journeys. A short course of antibiotics has been shown to be able to reduce the severity of symptoms and duration of illness.

**Gastro Pack:** A 'Gastro Pack' containing the commonly used medications used to treat traveller's diarrhoea is available at our clinic. It comes with written instructions on self medication whenever diarrhoea starts during travelling. It gives travellers a handy and convenient option when one is deciding what medicines to bring for trips.

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