

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Useful Tips on Travel and Food Safety

Montezuma's revenge, Delhi Belly, Seeping Slickness, Aztec Two-Step and Trotsky Trots are all creative names for the leading cause of illness for travellers. Yes, "travellers' diarrhea" affects 30 per cent to 50 per cent of all travellers. It usually resolves in two to three days, but can cause inconveniences like spending hours in the bathroom or in bed, or altering travel plans because of low energy levels and not wanting to be "too far" from a bathroom!

Keeping healthy and avoiding illness while traveling is essential for maximum enjoyment of vacation time. Becoming ill on the road happens all too often, but avoiding illness while traveling is possible.

What Can You Do?

With a little education, planning and common sense, you can stay healthy and get maximum satisfaction and enjoyment out of travel. Whether traveling locally or abroad, find out what food and water safety risks and precautions exist at your destination. If you follow some basic food and water safety guidelines, you and your family will stay healthy throughout your vacation.

Keeping Healthy While Traveling Locally

- Always wash hands well before and after preparing, serving or eating food, particularly perishables such as meats.
- Don't keep perishable foods, such as meats, dairy products, sauces, gravies, mayonnaise or sauce containing dishes in the "danger zone" (between 4 °C and 60 °C) for more than 2 hours. These foods should be refrigerated or kept in a cooler with ice. If you are traveling by plane or bus, using small lunch bags with small "fridge-packs" can do the trick.
- Carry non-perishable item like crackers, biscuits, energy bars, canned individual portioned items and "tetra pak" items.
- If you are preparing perishable items at a campsite, thoroughly cleanse with soap and water, all utensils, containers and work surfaces that come in contact with raw foods.
- Cook foods thoroughly, especially meats.
- Prevent cross-contamination. Never use the same cooking or cutting surface for ready-to-eat foods and foods to be cooked.
- If you're at a campsite and aren't sure of the water source, boil it to be safe.

Keeping Healthy While Traveling Abroad

Get informed about diseases common to travellers in the areas you hope to visit and find out how to avoid them. Most are spread by food and water including:

Travellers' diarrhea. This usually lasts two to three days and will most often stop on its own. Destinations like Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia pose a higher risk and younger people and children are more likely to develop it.

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Traveller's diarrhea is caused by ingested microorganisms, which damage the lining of the bowel and disrupt normal function. Poor sanitation or food handling, contaminated water and hot, humid climates all increase the risk of travellers' diarrhea.

The golden rule for traveling in areas where travellers' diarrhea is prevalent is "boil it, peel it, cook it, bottle it or leave it." This means:

- Boil all drinking water, including water for coffee and tea. If this isn't possible use only sealed, bottled water. Similarly, make sure juice and soft drink bottles are sealed before use.
- Avoid ice cubes.
- Avoid raw foods that may have been made with or washed in local water supplies, such as salads and soft cheeses.
- Avoid leftovers.
- Avoid foods with mayonnaise, cream, sauces and custards.
- Eat only well-cooked meat, poultry and seafood.
- Avoid buffets and street vendors.

Even though there are many things to avoid while abroad, maintaining adequate nutrition is important. Eat regular meals and high-energy snacks and drink lots of water.

Not drinking enough fluids leads to dehydration that can cause muscle cramps, heat exhaustion and heat stroke. Drink a minimum of two liters of water a day, more in hot climates, at high elevations and if participating in sports or high-intensity activities.

Hepatitis A. This is a liver disease caused by a virus transmitted by contaminated food. It's most commonly found in shellfish contaminated by sewage or by a food handler with the disease who has not properly washed.

A vaccine can give you a very high level of protection from the disease but plan ahead: the vaccine may require several months to take effect.

Hepatitis E. Less common than type A, but also a liver disease, spread in the same way. However, there is no vaccine currently available to protect against Hepatitis E.

Typhoid. This disease is caused by bacteria and spread by contaminated food or water. A vaccine is available.

Cholera. Generally travellers have little risk of contracting the bacteria that causes cholera. An oral vaccine is available for those at high risk.

Ciguatera. Caused by eating fish that contain a poison produced by the plants they eat, Ciguatera can be contracted in the Caribbean and South Pacific. Remember to:

- Avoid eating large predatory fish like snapper, grouper or jack.
- Watch the locals. If they are not eating it, you shouldn't either.
- Eat in reputable restaurants.

Giardiasis, Ambiasis and Cyclospora. These are diseases caused by protozoa. They, as well as intestinal worms, can be avoided by following food and water safety precautions.

Always learn as much as possible about the risks where you plan to travel. Consult a doctor, public health or travel clinic for advice and be sure to get appropriate vaccines. Above all, use common sense and stick to reasonable precautions, including food safety practices and having some basic medical supplies available. By following these rules, traveling to all corners of the globe can be enjoyable, rewarding and healthy.