

**Littlewick Medical Centre  
Travel Health Advice Leaflet**

The following information will help you to stay healthy on your trip.  
Please make sure you read it following on from your appointment with us.

**WATER**

Diseases can be caught from drinking contaminated water, or swimming in it.  
Unless you know the water supply is safe where you are staying,  
ONLY USE (in order of preference)

1. Boiled water
2. Bottled water or canned drinks
3. Water treated by a sterilising agent.

This includes water used to make ice cubes in drinks and water for cleaning your teeth

**SWIMMING**

It is safer to swim in water that is well chlorinated. If you are travelling to Africa, South America or some parts of the Caribbean, avoid swimming in fresh water lakes and streams. You can catch a parasitic disease called schistosomiasis from such places. This disease is also known as Bilharzia. It is also wise never to go barefoot, but to wear protective footwear when out, even on the beach. Other diseases can be caught from sand and soil, particularly wet soil.

**FOOD**

Contaminated food is the commonest source of many diseases abroad. You can help prevent it by following these guidelines :

- ONLY EAT WELL COOKED FRESH FOOD
- AVOID LEFTOVERS and REHEATED FOODS
- ENSURE MEAT IS THOROUGHLY COOKED
- EAT COOKED VEGETABLES, AVOID SALADS
- ONLY EAT FRUIT YOU CAN PEEL
- NEVER DRINK UNPASTEURISED MILK
- AVOID ICE-CREAM
- SHELLFISH IS A HIGH RISK FOOD
- AVOID BUYING FOOD FROM STREET VENDORS' STALLS AS A GENERAL RULE

***Two phrases to help you remember***

**COOK IT, PEEL IT, OR LEAVE IT!  
WHEN IN DOUBT, LEAVE IT OUT!**

**PERSONAL HYGIENE**

Many diseases are transmitted by what is known as the 'faecal-oral' route. To help prevent this, always wash your hands with soap and clean water after going to the toilet, before eating and before handling food. Using hand gel is another sensible option.

**TRAVELLERS' DIARRHOEA**

This the **most common illness** that you will be exposed to abroad and there is **NO vaccine against it**. Diarrhoea is caused by eating and/or drinking food and water contaminated by bacteria, viruses or parasites. Risk of illness is higher in some countries than others.

**High risk areas** include North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, the Indian Subcontinent, S.E. Asia, South America, Mexico and the Middle East.

**Medium risk areas** include the northern Mediterranean, Canary Islands and the Caribbean Islands.

**Low risk areas** include North America, Western Europe and Australia

You can certainly help **prevent** travellers' diarrhoea - make sure you follow the food, water and personal hygiene guidelines already given.

### What is travellers' diarrhoea?

Travellers' diarrhoea is 3 or more loose stools in a 24 hour period often accompanied by stomach pain, cramps and vomiting. It usually lasts 2-4 days and whilst it is not a life threatening illness, it can disrupt your trip for several days. The main danger of the illness is **dehydration**, and this, if very severe, can kill if it is not treated. **Treatment** is therefore **rehydration**. In severe cases and particularly in young children and the elderly, commercially prepared rehydration solution is extremely useful.

### Travel well prepared

A good tip is to take oral rehydration solutions with you. These can be bought over the counter in a chemist shop, available in tablet or sachet form — for example:

**DIORALYTE or ELECTROLADE or DIORALYTE RELIEF.** (The latter is a formula containing rice powder which also helps to relieve the diarrhoea, particularly useful in children). Prepare according to instructions. Take care regarding their use in very small children and seek medical advice where necessary.

**Anti diarrhoeal tablets** can be used for adults but should NEVER be USED in children under 4 years of age, and only on prescription for children aged 4 to 12 years.

Commonly used tablets are IMODIUM® and LOMOTIL® or NORMALOE®.

**None of these tablets should ever be used if the person has a temperature or blood in the stool.**

### Do contact medical help if the affected person has:-

- A temperature
- Blood in the diarrhoea
- Diarrhoea for more than 48 hours (or 24 hours in children)
- Becomes confused

In some circumstances, antibiotics are used as a standby treatment for travellers' diarrhoea. Such medication is not usually available on the NHS in anticipation of you being ill when away and needs to be prescribed. A woman taking the oral contraceptive pill may not have full contraceptive protection if she has had diarrhoea and vomiting. Extra precautions must be used - refer to your 'pill' information leaflet. If using condoms, take a supply of good quality ones with you which are CE approved.

### **HEPATITIS B and HIV INFECTION - these diseases can be transmitted by**

- Blood transfusion
- Medical procedures with non sterile equipment
- Sharing of needles (e.g. tattooing, body piercing, acupuncture and drug abuse)
- Sexual contact — Sexually transmitted infections or STIs are also transmitted this way

### Ways to protect yourself

- Only accept a blood transfusion when essential
- If travelling to a resource poor country, take a sterile medical kit
- Avoid procedures e.g. ear and body piercing, tattooing & acupuncture
- Avoid casual sex, especially without using condoms

### INSECT BITES

Mosquitoes, certain types of flies, ticks and bugs can cause many different diseases. e.g. malaria, dengue fever, yellow fever. Some bite at night, but some during daytime so protection is needed at all times.

#### Avoid being bitten by:

- Covering up skin as much as possible if going out at night, (mosquitoes that transmit malaria bite from dusk until dawn). Wear loose fitting clothes, long sleeves, trousers or long skirts.
- Use insect repellents on exposed skin. (DEET containing products are the most effective. A content of up to 50% DEET is recommended for tropical destinations). Clothes can be sprayed with repellents too or clothing specific sprays .g. permethrin. Check suitability for children on the individual products. If using sunscreen always apply first, followed by an insect repellent spray on top.
- If room is not air conditioned, but is screened, close shutters early evening and spray room with knockdown insecticide spray. In malarious regions, if camping, or sleeping in unprotected accommodation, always sleep under a mosquito net (impregnated with permethrin). Avoid camping near areas of stagnant water, these are common breeding areas for mosquitoes etc.
- Electric insecticide vaporisers are very effective as long as there are no power failures!
- There is **no scientific evidence** that electric buzzers, savoury yeast extract, tea tree oil, bath oils, garlic and vitamin B are effective.
- Homeopathic and herbal medications should NEVER be used as an alternative to conventional measures for malaria prevention.

### MALARIA

Malaria is a disease spread by mosquitoes, there is no vaccine yet available. If you are travelling to a malarious country, the travel adviser will have given you a separate leaflet with more details, please read it. Remember malaria is a serious and sometimes fatal disease. If you develop flu like symptoms, including fever, sweats, chills, feeling unwell, headaches, muscle pains, cough, diarrhoea – then seek medical help immediately for advice and say you've been abroad. This is VITAL, don't delay.

Remember the ABCD of malaria prevention advice:

- A**wareness of the risk
- B**ite prevention
- C**hemoprophylaxis (taking the correct tablets)
- D**iagnosis (knowing the symptoms and acting quickly)

### ANIMAL BITES

Rabies is present in many parts of the world. If a person develops rabies, death is 100% certain.

#### THERE ARE 3 RULES REGARDING RABIES

1. Do not touch any animal, even dogs and cats
2. If you are licked on broken skin, scratched or bitten by an animal in a country which has rabies, wash the wound thoroughly with soap and running water for 10 - 15 minutes, then apply an antiseptic solution if possible e.g. iodine or alcohol. Such precautions also apply if you are licked by the animal with their saliva coming into contact with your eyes or inside your mouth (essentially any mucous membranes)
3. Seek medical advice **IMMEDIATELY**, even if you have been previously immunised, **this is absolutely essential**

### ACCIDENTS

Major leading causes of death in travellers abroad are due to **accidents**, predominantly road traffic accidents and swimming/water accidents. You can help prevent them by following sensible precautions

### **PRECAUTIONARY GUIDELINES**

- ✓ Never dive into water where the depth is uncertain
- ✓ Only swim in safe water, check currents, sharks, jellyfish etc.
- ✓ Avoid alcohol when driving, especially at night
- ✓ Avoid hiring motorcycles and mopeds
- ✓ If hiring a car, rent a large one if possible, ensure the tyres, brakes and seat belts are in good condition
- ✓ Use reliable taxi firms, know where emergency facilities are

### **PERSONAL SAFETY AND SECURITY**

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) provide excellent information about this. They have information for many different types of travel and also advise on travel to specific destinations in times of political unrest and natural disasters. Please go to their website for more information at <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-office>

### **INSURANCE COVER**

- Take out adequate insurance cover for your trip. This should possibly include medical repatriation as without it, this service is extremely expensive if needed.
- If you have any pre existing medical conditions, make sure you inform the insurance company of these details and check the small print of the policy thoroughly.
- If you travel to a European Union country, make sure you have obtained an EHIC card before you travel which takes some time to obtain. Further information about the EHIC is found at <http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcareabroad/EHIC/Pages/Applyingandrenewing.aspx>
- Please note, additional travel insurance is still advised even if you have an EHIC card.

### **AIR TRAVEL**

It is sensible on any long haul flight to be comfortable in your seat. Exercise your legs, feet and toes while sitting every half an hour or so and take short walks whenever feasible. Upper body and breathing exercises can further improve circulation.

### **SUN AND HEAT**

Sunburn and heat-stroke cause serious problems in travellers but in the long term can be a serious cause of skin cancer. There is no such thing as a safe suntan, but the following advice should be taken:

### **PRECAUTIONARY GUIDELINES**

- Increase sun exposure gradually
- Use sun blocks which contain both UVA and UVB protection and sufficient sun protection factor (SPF) and a minimum of SPF 15. Children under 3 years should have a minimum of SPF 25 and babies under 6 months should be kept out of the sun at all times. Reapply often and always after swimming and washing. Read manufacturer instructions
- Always apply sunscreen first followed by an insect repellent spray on top
- Wear protective clothing – sunhats, T shirts and sunglasses etc.
- Avoid going out between 11am - 3pm, when the sun's rays are strongest
- Take special care of children and those with pale skin/red hair
- Drink extra fluids in a hot climate
- Be aware that alcohol can make you dehydrated

### **For additional information sources**



**Littlewick**  
Medical Centre



42 Nottingham Road, Ilkeston, Derbyshire DE7 5PR  
Tel: 0115 932 5229 • Fax: 0115 932 5413  
[www.littlewickmedicalcentre.co.uk](http://www.littlewickmedicalcentre.co.uk)

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[www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-office](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-office)

Based on Jane Chiodani 2010