

## **PREVENTING ILLNESS AND INJURY WHILE TRAVELLING**

### **Jet Lag**

- If staying in a time zone for more than two days, follow local sleep-wake habits as soon as possible.
- Melatonin (3–10 mg) usually taken before night-time sleep in the new time zone may be helpful.
- Talk to your healthcare provider about a sleeping medication if needed.

### **Motion Sickness**

- Drive instead of being a passenger, sit in the front seat, over the plane wing, hold your head firmly against the seat back, choose a window seat. If appropriate, lie down, shut eyes, or look at the horizon.
- Drink plenty of fluids, eat frequent, small meals, limit alcohol and caffeine, and avoid smoking.
- Consider an over the counter anti-nausea medication (it can cause drowsiness).

### **Injuries and Security**

Let friends and family know your detailed itinerary and carry the contact information for the Canadian government offices in the country you plan to visit ( available at <https://travel.gc.ca/assistance/embassies-consulates>).

Consider **Registration for Canadians Abroad** online at <https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/registration>) or abroad at a Canadian government office. This allows the government to contact and assist you in the event of an emergency.

- Find out about traffic regulations and road systems in your destination. Wear a helmet and protective clothing when using motorcycles or bicycles. Carefully check over rental cars. Use seat belts and child safety seats in cars and taxis. Ride only in marked taxis. Avoid overcrowded buses.
- Avoid using local, unscheduled aircraft. If possible, take larger planes (> 30 seats) in good weather during the day. Wear seatbelts throughout the flight.
- Avoid swimming alone or in unfamiliar waters. Wear a life jacket during water recreation activities.
- Stay below the 6th floor of hotels to increase the chances of being rescued in case of a fire.
- Never try to pet, handle or feed unfamiliar animals (domestic or wild, even in settings such as petting zoos).

### **Sunburn**

- Avoid the sun from 11:00am to 4:00pm.
- Wear a wide-brimmed, breathable hat or use an umbrella. Wear sunglasses that protect against UVA/UVB rays. Use “broad spectrum” sunscreen (SPF of at least 15). Reapply every two hours or after sweating or swimming.
- When using an insect repellent containing DEET: Apply sunscreen more often, apply sunscreen first, and allow 15 minutes prior to applying repellent. DEET decreases the effectiveness of sunscreen and conversely sunscreen can increase absorption of DEET).

### **Bug Bites and Ticks**

- Wear full-length, light colour, loose fitting clothes – tape cuffs of pants or place inside footwear.
- Use insect repellent on exposed skin that contains  $\geq 20\%$  DEET or 20% icaridin. When treating clothing, wear gloves and do not treat underwear. Permethrin is used to treat fabric- lasts for multiple washes on natural fibre clothing but does not adhere well to some synthetic fibres. DEET and icaridin can also be used to treat clothing, but has to be applied again after every wash.
- Try to stay in accommodations that are air conditioned or have good window and door screens. If not possible and travelling to an area with mosquito born illnesses, sleep under a mosquito net (ideally treated with insecticide).
- Inspect for ticks during/after high-risk activities and follow procedures for removal.

### **Travellers' Diarrhea**

- Eat only foods that are well cooked and served piping hot. Avoid raw or undercooked meats and fish/shellfish. Only eat fruits and vegetables if you have washed them in safe water or peeled them yourself. Avoid salads or other dishes made with fresh produce, and food from street vendors.
- Drink only water that has been boiled, disinfected or is in a commercially sealed bottle. Use ice made only from purified or disinfected water. Brush your teeth with purified or bottled water. To avoid getting water into your mouth or up your nose when swimming or bathing.
- Wash your hands with soap regularly, especially after bathroom use and before cooking/eating. Use alcohol-based hand sanitizers ( $\geq 60\%$  alcohol) when handwashing is not possible.

### **Sexually transmitted Infections (STIs)**

- Take a supply of high-quality male/female condoms, and use them for every sexual encounter.
- Choose your partners wisely, remember that drugs and alcohol can impair your decision-making

### **Culture Shock**

If travelling or living in a different country and culture for extended periods, you may experience a significant sense of dislocation and unease that can negatively impact your mental and physical health. Information on recognition and management can be found at: <https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/living-abroad/culture-shock>



## **PREVENTING ILLNESS AND INJURY WHILE TRAVELLING cont'd**

### **HIGH RISK SITUATIONS**

#### **Scuba diving**

- Never scuba dive alone or without proper instruction/certification from a reputable organization.
- Avoid alcohol and stay well hydrated and rested before diving.
- Wait 12 hours before air travel if doing one dive/day. Wait 24–48 hours if doing multiple dives/day or dives that require decompression stops.
- Check that your travel insurance covers accidents/injuries related to scuba diving.

#### **High altitude**

- Acclimatize by spending 2–3 nights at 2500–3000 m. Subsequent increases in sleeping elevation should be <500 m/d with an extra day allowed for acclimatization to every 1000 m.
- Ascend gradually and sleep at lower altitudes when hiking to higher altitudes.
- For the first 48 hours, avoid alcohol and physical exertion.
- Talk to your health care provider about the need to take acetazolamide before you ascend.

#### **Blood clots**

- Request an aisle seat and be sure to stand up, walk around or stretch your legs regularly.
- Consider wearing below-knee, graduated compression stockings if you are at risk of blood clots.

#### **Animal Bites**

- Avoid petting, handling or feeding unfamiliar animals (both domestic and wild, even in captive settings such as game ranches or petting zoos). If you are caving, you may need to wear personal protective equipment due to the high chance of being exposed to bats.
- If bitten/licked/scratched by an animal, clean the wound thoroughly with soap and water and/or iodine. Seek immediate medical care where appropriate post-exposure rabies immunoglobulin and rabies vaccination can be received. If this is not available in the area where you are, it is critical to travel immediately so that this level of care can be received within 24 hours of the animal contact. Delay stitching up the wound and quickly seek medical care for preventive treatment even if you have had the rabies vaccine.

### **Basic Medical Kit**

Alcohol-based hand sanitizer	Insect bite treatment
Antiseptic wound cleanser (e.g., alcohol pads)	Antihistamine tablets
Adhesive tape and bandages (several sizes)	Nasal decongestant
Sterile dressing (gauze)	Oral rehydration salts
Disposable latex or vinyl gloves	Simple pain reliever (e.g., ibuprofen or acetaminophen)
Blister pads or moleskin	Thermometer
Tensor bandages	Sunscreen
Adhesive strips to close small wounds	Earplugs
Scissors, safety pins	Tweezers for removing ticks
Emollient (lubricant) eye drops	
Insect repellent that contains DEET or icaridin	

Additional items may be needed according to your destination (e.g., mosquito nets) and individual needs (e.g., condoms, oral contraceptives). Carry your immunization record, proof of travel health insurance, obstetric notes (if relevant) and contact information card in case of a medical emergency including your doctor's contact details.

### **If You Have a Chronic Illness**

- Take all medications/medical items for the entire trip. Bring more than enough to last your entire trip.
- Pack all medications (in their original containers with clear labels) in carry-on luggage. Pack a duplicate supply in your checked luggage in case of loss or theft. Take a copy of the original prescription and ensure that both the generic and trade names of the medication are included.
- Carry a note from your doctor, certifying the necessity for any drugs or other medical items (e.g. syringes) that may be questioned by customs officials and/or security personnel.

**Sources:** **1)** Public Health Agency of Canada and Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada. Well on Your Way: A Canadian's Guide To Healthy Travel Abroad. 2014. [https://travel.gc.ca/docs/publications/bon\\_depart\\_on\\_your\\_way-eng.pdf](https://travel.gc.ca/docs/publications/bon_depart_on_your_way-eng.pdf); **2)** Schwartz BS, Larocque RC, Ryan ET. In the clinic. Travel medicine. *Annals of internal medicine*. Jun 05 2012;156(11):ITC6-1-ITC16-16.; **3)** World Health Organization. International travel and health. 2012. <http://www.who.int/ith>; **4)** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Yellow Book – CDC Health Information for International Travel 2018. 2017. <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2018/table-of-contents>; **5)** Johnson NJ, Luks AM. High-Altitude Medicine. *The Medical clinics of North America*. Mar 2016;100(2):357-369.

