

# Bon Voyage

READY FOR SOME FUN IN THE SUN? BEFORE YOU GO, CONSULT OUR HANDY CHECKLIST FOR TIPS ON STAYING HEALTHY WHEN ABROAD.

BY KATE DALEY



## GET A MEDICAL ASSESSMENT

The optimal time to head to a travel clinic is four to eight weeks before your planned trip, but any time before departure is acceptable, says Dr. Jay Keystone, MD, a staff physician in the tropical disease unit of the Toronto General Hospital and director of Medisys Travel Clinic. While your general practitioner can advise you on low-risk destinations, they may not know the latest health issues in the developing world. An assessment is especially important for high-risk travellers (the elderly, young children or people with chronic health issues), those staying for prolonged visits, or those staying in a rural area.



## GET VACCINATED

Update your routine vaccines and your travel vaccines before you go, says Dr. Keystone. Patients generally need hepatitis A and B, tetanus and flu shots. Those going on longer trips may require the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine. Always ask about specialty vaccines (such as yellow fever, Japanese encephalitis or meningitis), as you may require a proof of vaccination before you can enter certain countries. Travellers can also take oral vaccines such as Dukoral, which helps protect against traveller's diarrhea and cholera.



## KNOW YOUR RISKS

The most common illness acquired abroad is traveller's diarrhea. "The old rule is: boil it, peel it, cook it or forget it. It's easy to remember but impossible to do," says Dr. Keystone. His rules are: 1) Don't drink the water unless you're sure it has been purified. 2) Don't put ice cubes in your drinks. 3) Only drink commercially bottled beverages. 4) Keep salads and street vendors to a minimum. 5) Avoid unpasteurized milk and milk products.

Also, if you can't drink the water, make sure to brush your teeth with bottled beverages. According to Dr. Keystone, 97 percent of travellers eat or drink something they shouldn't within 72 hours of arrival. No traveller should leave home without an antibiotic for self-treatment of traveller's diarrhea. If you have to travel when you're sick or if you have enough diarrhea to interfere with your daily activities, take an antidiarrheal and start your antibiotics. Pepto Bismol helps, says Dr. Keystone, and taking a probiotic after you've recovered can get your stomach back on track for the rest of your trip.



## PACK YOUR (MEDICAL) BAG

Bring a copy of any prescriptions (with the generic names included) so you can get a refill if you need one, says Dr. Keystone. Your medications should always be in your carry-on in case you lose your checked luggage, with extras in case your return flight is delayed. Other items you'll need? Sunscreen, bug spray with DEET, hand sanitizer, an antihistamine in case of allergic reactions and acetaminophen in case of illness or fever. And pack some fibre; diarrhea isn't the only tummy trouble people encounter on vacation. Many experience constipation from the change in diet. Adding fibre-rich fruits and vegetables to your diet or taking a fibre supplement can help manage occasional constipation.



## MINIMIZE JET LAG

Avoid alcohol on the flight and keep hydrated to avoid jet lag, says Dr. Keystone. Once you arrive, get outside and expose your body to natural light to acclimatize yourself. If you still have sleep troubles, try a temporary sleep aid for the short term.