

Swarthmore College Student Health Services



# TRAVELER'S COMPANION

## Travel Health Information

### Protect Yourself

Mosquitos along with other biting insects can cause serious infections and fatal diseases. Once your itinerary is reviewed, we can help determine if you will be at risk for any of the following:

#### ◆ MALARIA

Malaria is a widespread mosquito borne disease caused by any one of 4 species of one-celled parasites, called Plasmodium. The parasite is spread to people by the female Anopheles mosquito, which feeds on human blood and typically bites at night. People with Malaria often experience fever, chills and flu-like symptoms. While 4 species of Malaria parasites can infect humans and cause illness, only Malaria caused by Plasmodium falciparum is potentially life threatening. Malaria can be found in much of sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, South and Central America the Middle East and Oceania.

It is the most serious potential risk for travelers to the tropics. You can reduce your risk of infection through:

Awareness: check [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) website for areas at risk.

Avoidance: Personal protective measures (PPM) against mosquitos are the first line of defense against Malaria. The use of insect repellent containing one of the following active ingredients: DEET 30-50%, Picaridin 7-15%, Oil of Lemon Eucalyptus or PMD (the synthesized version of OLE), or IR3535, provide reasonably long lasting protection. Protective clothing, mosquito nets and reduced nighttime exposure will lower the risk of acquiring Malaria.

Antimalarial medication: There are medications you can take to help prevent malaria. Which medication you take will depend on where you are traveling.

**The best protection is to not get bit in the first place!**

If you develop a fever DURING your trip OR EVEN AFTER you return home for up to a year, **SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION IMMEDIATELY!** A fever in a returning traveler is considered Malaria until proven otherwise. The precautions outlined above are helpful in reducing risk of infection but are not 100% guaranteed to prevent Malaria. Prompt medical attention can make the difference between life and death.

#### ◆ DENGUE FEVER

Dengue fever is the most common disease spread by a mosquito in the world. Dengue is found in tropical and sub-tropical regions of the world. Unlike malaria, the mosquito that carries dengue bites **DURING THE DAY**. It breeds in urban areas where standing water can be easily found. Use personal protective measures (PPM) to reduce the risk of infection.

Symptoms of dengue are sudden onset of high fever, severe HA, nausea and vomiting, muscle and joint pain and a general feeling of weakness.

**SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION IMMEDIATELY!**

## **Personal Protective Measures**

### Avoidance

- ◆ Avoid outdoor activities at night. Retreat to a well screened in area.
- ◆ Avoid using scented soaps or perfumes.
- ◆ Wear clothes that cover most of the body. Tuck pants into socks.
- ◆ Light colored clothing won't attract mosquitos as much as darker clothing.
- ◆ Wear boots or sneakers, not sandals

### Insect Repellents

- ◆ Use an insect repellent containing DEET in a concentration of 30-50% or Picaridin in a concentration of 7-15%, Oil of Lemon Eucalyptus, or IR3535 for most activities. DEET can last up to 12 hours. Apply sunscreen at least 30 minutes prior to applying a DEET-based insect repellent.

### Protective Clothing

- ◆ The use of Permethrin, an insecticide, to spray or impregnate clothing or mosquito nets is highly recommended for protection against mosquitos and other insects.
- ◆ Treated fabric will last through multiple washings. The combined use of DEET on the skin and Permethrin on clothing is highly effective in protection against insects.

### Mosquito Nets

- ◆ Research shows that sleeping under a mosquito net, especially one impregnated with Permethrin, is highly effective against night-biting insects. Inspect nets thoroughly for holes.
- ◆ After you get under the netting, tuck netting under the mattress, ensuring that no mosquitos can get inside.

Websites for preventative health and safety information: [www.cdc.gov/travel/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/travel/index.htm);  
[www.tripprep.com](http://www.tripprep.com);

Websites for mosquito repellants/water filters/water tablets/ORT: [www.sawyerproducts.com](http://www.sawyerproducts.com); [www.REI.com](http://www.REI.com)

## TRAVEL SMART

### Safety and Security

General Guidelines and safety tips worth considering:

- ◆ **USE COMMON SENSE.** If you wouldn't go out at night in an unknown neighborhood at home, DON'T DO it overseas.
- ◆ **BE AWARE.** Be aware of the social, political or medical conditions in the countries you are visiting.
- ◆ **BLEND IN.** Don't dress like a tourist ☺.
- ◆ **Avoid alcohol and illicit drug use!**

### Travel Health Insurance

- ◆ Before you travel, make sure your health insurance policy covers you outside of the United States and if so, determine whether that coverage applies to:
  - Pre-existing conditions
  - Conditions acquired during travel
  - Hospitalization coverage
  - Medical evacuation from foreign countries
- ◆ There are TRAVEL HEALTH insurance policies you can purchase as supplemental protection.

### The Responsible Traveler

- ◆ Be an informed traveler
- ◆ Know the "do's and don'ts" of your travel destinations
- ◆ **Respect the ways and laws** of the countries you are visiting
- ◆ Minimize the amount of jewelry you wear regardless of the value. The poverty of many countries increases the temptation for crime.
- ◆ Dress comfortably, but conservatively. This is particularly true for women, in light of cultural and religious traditions toward women in many societies.
- ◆ Be aware of the potential travel opportunities that may put you at risk. Prepare before you leave with extra malaria medications and other vaccines as discussed in your travel consult.
- ◆ Research credit card/debit card /ATM availability.
- ◆ Research the health care system in the area of travel- what services are available to you from the school where you are studying or the sponsoring program.

## Be “Food-Wise” and “Water-Smart”

(Boil it, peel it or forget it!)

Be “Food-Wise” (think before you eat)

- ◆ Eat food that has been thoroughly cooked, recently cooked AND that is served piping hot. Avoid “warm” food such as casserole dishes and buffet food, which have been left at room temperature and “re-warmed”.
- ◆ Avoid cold foods such as salads, raw vegetables and fruits. Eat fresh fruit that you can peel yourself, washing the outside surface first to avoid contamination by your own hands (e.g. bananas, oranges, pineapples...)
- ◆ Avoid unpasteurized milk and dairy products, including cheese.
- ◆ Watch out for fresh sauces (e.g. salsa) and condiments that sit out at room temperature.
- ◆ Avoid food from street vendors. Such food is often not well prepared, served under unhygienic conditions, and the food storage practices questionable.
- ◆ Avoid uncooked seafood or raw meat.
- ◆ Food that is “steaming hot” is a good rule of thumb!

Be “Water-Smart” (consider all water in lesser developed countries to be UNSAFE)

- Where water is assumed to be contaminated, the same goes for ice.
- Drink coffee and/or tea only if you know the water used has come to a rolling boil.
- Commercially bottled water, carbonated water, soft drinks, fruit juices, beer and wine are considered safe. Make sure to wipe clean and dry the can or bottle before consuming.
- Avoid “local” bottled water. Make sure the cap was sealed when you open it.
- Brush your teeth with bottled water. Protect your toothbrush with a cover.
- Tap water is safe for bathing, but avoid getting water in your eyes or mouth when bathing or showering.
- You can make local water safe for consumption by **boiling** it for one minute and allowing cooling to room temperature without adding ice. When boiling water is not possible you may use ***iodine or chloride dioxide tablets*** (available at most pharmacy and sporting goods stores). However, it is best to both purify and filter your water. Combination systems are available. You may also use ***commercially available water filters*** (NOTE: these are different than the water filters you might use at home).

## Other Things to Talk About

### Altitude

- ◆ Itineraries that take you to altitudes above 6,000-8,000 ft. may cause symptoms of altitude sickness. The most common type of altitude sickness is Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS), caused by the effects of low oxygen to the brain. Symptoms of AMS are a dull throbbing headache, nausea/vomiting, and loss of appetite, fatigue, dizziness or insomnia. Acclimatization prevents altitude illness, improves sleep and increases comfort and well-being. Increased ventilation is the most important factor in acclimatization; therefore respiratory depressants should be avoided.

Tips for acclimatization:

- \* Ascend gradually, if possible. Try not to go directly from low altitude to more than 9,000 ft. sleeping altitude in 1 day. Once above 9,000 ft, move sleeping altitude no higher than 1,600 ft per day, and plan an extra day for acclimatization every 3,300 ft .
- \* Consider using acetazolamide to speed acclimatization, if abrupt ascent is unavoidable.
- \* Avoid alcohol for the first 48 hours.
- \* Participate in only mild exercise for the first 48 hours.
- \* Having a high-altitude exposure at more than 9,000 ft for 2 nights or more, within 30 days before the trip, is useful.

### Jet Lag

- ◆ The effects of jet lag are a result of your body's circadian rhythm being out of sync with your activities. It may take 24 hrs for your body to "readjust" for each time zone crossed. Symptoms include: insomnia, fatigue, changes in appetite and irritability. Recommendations include: adjusting pre-travel sleep schedule, light therapy, diet and exercise.

### Deep Vein Thrombosis

- ◆ Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) is a blood clot that develops in an arm or leg vein. Long airline flights (e.g. across the ocean or multiple continents) with long periods of immobility allow blood to pool possibly result in clot formation.
- ◆ Risk factors for DVT formation in the student traveler include obesity, smoking, oral contraceptive use, casted or splinted extremities and recent surgery as well as heart disease, blood or clotting disorders, varicose veins, diabetes, cancer, or previous episodes of DVT's. Travelers are advised to periodically get up and stretch their arms and legs as well as move their feet and toes throughout the flight to stimulate blood flow.

### Sun Protection

- ◆ Tropical sunshine can be very harmful. If sun exposure is unavoidable, build up your exposure from 15-20 minutes a day and avoid mid-day sun (11am-3pm).
- ◆ **USE SUNSCREEN!** Sunscreen with SPF 15 blocks approximately 93% of damaging ultraviolet light, while SPF 30 blocks 96%. Apply sunscreen 15-30 minutes before exposure and reapply after washing, swimming, or excessive sweating. One ounce of sunscreen (approximately a “palm-full”) is needed for complete coverage. A good rule of thumb is: 8oz. of sunscreen/ person/ week of travel.
- ◆ Wear clothing that covers arms and legs. Clothing that is UV-protective is available.
- ◆ Wear hats with a brim to protect your face. Protect the back of your neck as well with sunscreen and/or protective covering.
- ◆ Protect your eyes with polarized, UV sunglasses.
- ◆ Treat sunburns with increased fluid intake, pain relievers such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) and/or cool compresses. Do not use oily skin treatments as they trap in heat and can make sunburn more uncomfortable. Leave blisters intact. Keep skin moist with aloe or moisturizing cream. Seek medical attention if fever or nausea/vomiting develop which can be signs of sun poisoning.
- ◆ Several medications can increase the skin’s sensitivity to sun e.g. anti-malarials, antibiotics and non-steroidal anti-inflammatories.

### Motor Vehicle Accidents

- ◆ Travelers should be aware of the rules of the road in other countries as both passenger and driver.

## Travel Health Kits

When traveling with medications, remember the following:

- ◆ **Original containers:** All medications should be carried in their original containers with clear labels.
- ◆ **Prescriptions:** Travelers should carry copies of all prescriptions, including their generic names.
- ◆ **Physician notes:** For controlled substances and injectable medications, travelers are advised to carry a note from the prescribing physician on letterhead stationary.
- ◆ **Availability:** A travel health kit is only helpful when it is available. It should be carried with the traveler at all times (e.g. carry-on bag). Keep in mind, that due to airline security rules, sharp objects and some liquids and gels must remain in checked luggage.

Travelers with pre-existing medical conditions should carry enough medication for the duration of their trip and an extra supply, in case the trip is extended for any reason.

Persons with pre-existing medical conditions, such as diabetes or allergies to envenomations or medications, should consider wearing an alert bracelet as well as keeping a card with this information in their wallet and with other travel documents.

### **Basic items recommended for Travel Health Kit: Medications**

- Destination related, if applicable:
  - Antimalarial medications
  - ciprofloxacin for travelers diarrhea
- Pain or fever:
  - Acetaminophen
  - Ibuprofen
- Stomach upset or diarrhea:
  - Over-the-counter antidiarrheal (such as loperamide or bismuth subsalicylate)
  - Antibiotic for self-treatment of moderate to severe diarrhea
  - Oral rehydration solution packets
  - Mild laxative
  - Antacid
- Items to treat throat and respiratory symptoms:
  - Antihistamine
  - Decongestant, alone or in combination with antihistamine
  - Throat lozenges
- Anti-motion sickness medication.
- Epinephrine auto-injector (EPI PEN), especially if history of allergic reaction.
- Any medication, prescription or over-the-counter, taken on a regular basis at home



**Basic First Aid**

- Disposable gloves (at least 2 pairs)
- Adhesive bandages, multiple sizes
- Gauze
- Adhesive tape
- Ace wrap for sprains and strains
- Antiseptic
- Cotton swabs
- Tweezers and scissors (packed in checked luggage)
- Antifungal/antibacterial ointments or creams
- 1% hydrocortisone cream
- Anti-itch gel or cream for insect bites and stings
- Aloe gel for sunburns
- Moleskin for blisters
- Digital thermometer
- Saline eye drops

**Other Important Items**

- Insect repellent (20-35% DEET)
- Sunscreen (SPF 15 or greater)
- Antibacterial hand wipes or alcohol based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol
- Extra pair of contacts or prescription glasses or both for people who wear corrective lenses
- Latex condoms
- Water purification tablets

**Contact Card**

- It is important for travelers to locate and record important contact information, in case of an emergency. Having a contact card with the following information will save time in urgent situations:
  - Family member or close contact still in the U.S.
  - Health care provider at home
  - Area hospitals or clinics
  - U.S. Embassy or Consulate in the destination country or countries