

Healthy travelling

The Health Column

July 2
2014

Thanks to a fairly strong Australian dollar and our well known sense of adventure, more and more Australians are travelling overseas, often to exotic and remote locations. As the number of Australians travelling overseas increases, so do the number of travellers who become ill, sometimes fatally.

There are many things you can do to ensure you are a healthy traveller, and your local pharmacy can assist with these preparations. Firstly, visit your GP and have a thorough check up to ensure there are no underlying health issues which may affect your travels. Then speak to your local pharmacist or look for a pharmacy offering travel advice services or travel clinics. They can advise on issues such as vaccinations, travelling with medications and treating common travel illnesses.



Photo by Morgan Noguellou

Infectious diseases that cause some of the illnesses when travelling are often preventable through vaccinations. Vaccinations may be an entry requirement of some countries so check with the embassy or consulate of the countries you are intending to transit through or visit. In some countries, you may be refused entry or required to have the vaccination at the border.

It's never too late to vaccinate; however, some vaccines require a long period to take effect and more than one dose may be needed – so factor this time into your plans. You may also need boosters for childhood vaccines.

It is recommended you seek professional advice and have any vaccinations prior to leaving Australia. Discuss your personal travel plans with a pharmacist or visit a pharmacy providing a travel advisory service. They can help ensure you know the correct vaccinations needed for your trip, and any booster doses of childhood vaccinations. The pharmacist will refer you to a doctor as needed.

Before travelling, visit your doctor and pharmacist to get a supply of any prescription medicines you may need (checking with the relevant embassy or consulate in Australia to see if there are limitations on what you can take). Take enough medicine to cover the length of your trip. If you need to travel with large quantities of medicine, it's good practice to divide portions among different pieces of your luggage in case bags go missing.

It's an offence to carry or send Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) medicine overseas unless it's for your own personal use, or for the use of someone travelling with you. You could be fined \$5,000 and spend two years in prison if you break the law. More detailed information is available on the Department of Health website or by calling the PBS information line on 1800 020 613.

The Australian Government's excellent Smart Traveller website (www.smartraveller.gov.au) recommends carrying a letter from your doctor detailing what the medicine is, how much you'll be taking with you, and stating that it's for your own personal use.

Keep all medicine in the original container clearly labelled with your name and dosage instructions to avoid customs problems.

If you have to inject your medicine, it may be preferable to carry your own needles and syringes if permissible in the countries you're visiting. If you buy needles and syringes overseas, ensure they are sealed and sterile.

It can be difficult to buy medicines and first aid supplies in countries where you do not speak or read the language. Your pharmacist can provide recommendations for over the counter medicines and first aid supplies which are useful to take with you. 'Travellers' diarrhoea' is a common but often preventable problem of travellers and there are some simple medicines to take with you that make a great addition to any travel insurance policy.

Your local pharmacy can supply you with other useful items such as:

- Rehydration fluid
- Sunscreen and insect repellent
- Items for the plane including ear plugs, eye drops for dry eye, compression garments
- Basic pain relief
- Allergy medication
- Wound care products
- Foot care products

If you need to purchase medicine at your destination, be careful to avoid imitation or counterfeit medicines and prescription drugs, and always check the strength of a medicine with a doctor. Be aware that packaging and labelling may be similar to those available in Australia, but the strength and active ingredients can vary from country to country.

So before you take off for your next overseas holiday or business trip, first visit your local pharmacy. Self Care pharmacies can give you the *Travel Health* information Self Care Fact Card. To find a Self Care pharmacy, call the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA) on 1300 369 772 or log onto the PSA website at www.psa.org.au and click on 'Self Care' then 'Find a Self Care Pharmacy'.