

Your destination for travel health

The Health Column

01 Jun
2016

Due to improved ease of travel 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.

First of all, visit your general practitioner for 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 you on issues such as vaccinations, travelling with medicines, and treating common travel illnesses.

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

It is recommended you seek professional advice and have any vaccinations prior to leaving Australia. 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.

Discuss your personal travel plans with a pharmacist or visit a pharmacy providing a travel advisory service. They can help to ensure you are aware of the required vaccinations for your trip, and any booster doses of childhood vaccinations. The pharmacist will refer you to a doctor if needed.

Also make sure to visit your GP/pharmacist before travelling for a supply of any prescription/over the counter 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 is 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 Smart Traveller website (www.smarttraveller.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.

While travelling, make sure to:

- 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).

Your local pharmacy is your health destination. Pharmacists and pharmacy staff can advise on travel health and travel health-related service/s. Your local pharmacy can also 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 medicine
- wound care products
- foot care products.

It can be difficult to buy medicines and first aid supplies in countries where you do not speak or read the language. If you still need to purchase medicine at your travel destination, be careful to avoid imitation or counterfeit medicines (including prescription medicines), 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. 'Travellers' diarrhoea' is a common, but often preventable problem for travellers and there are some simple medicines to take with you that make a great addition to any travel insurance policy.

You can get more detailed information on travel health from the Self Care Fact Card titled *Travel health* available from pharmacies providing the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia's Self Care health information.

For the nearest Self Care pharmacy location phone the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia on 1300 369 772, or go to www.psa.org.au 'Supporting practice' then 'Self Care', and then 'Find a Self Care pharmacy'.