

TRAVEL HEALTH ADVICE FOR CHILDREN

IMMUNISATIONS

Make sure that your child is up to date with their routine childhood immunisations – for further advice speak to your health visitor or practice nurse. Book a travel health appointment to see your practice nurse at least 8 weeks before your trip to arrange any travel immunisations you may need. Your practice nurse will also offer sensible travel health advice so that you and your family have a happy and healthy holiday.

FOOD: COOK IT, PEEL IT OR LEAVE IT

Only eat:

- Well cooked fresh food
- Thoroughly cooked meat
- Fruit you can peel and cooked vegetables

Avoid eating:

- Leftovers and reheated food
- Icecream and shellfish
- Food from street vendors
- Salads

Never drink unpasteurised milk

WATER

Children can catch diseases from drinking, swimming or playing in contaminated water. This includes water used for ice cubes and when cleaning teeth. Unless you are sure that the water supply is safe follow these guidelines (in order of preference):

- Boiled water (cooled)
- Bottled water or canned drinks
- Water treated with a sterilising agent
- **Do not use mineral water to make up infant formula milk. Use cooled previously boiled water**

PERSONAL HYGIENE

Make sure your child always washes their hands with soap and water after going to the toilet and before eating or handling food. Hand wipes are a useful alternative if you are not able to use handwashing facilities.

TRAVELLER'S DIARRHOEA

Food and water may be contaminated by bacteria, viruses and parasites and can cause traveller's diarrhoea. To reduce the risk follow the food, water and personal hygiene guidelines. Traveller's diarrhoea can cause dehydration which can be life threatening if it is not treated. Rehydration is very important; special sachets of oral rehydration treatment can be bought from your pharmacist but may not be easily available abroad. Get medical help quickly if the affected child has a fever, is vomiting, has blood in the diarrhoea, has diarrhoea for more than 24 hours or becomes confused as hospital admission may be necessary.

INSECT BITES

Bites from mosquitoes, ticks, sandflies and tsetse flies can cause diseases such as malaria, Japanese B encephalitis and yellow fever. Insect bites are a risk at any time of the day, at dusk and at night. Bite avoidance is the only way to prevent some diseases such as dengue fever. Your main protection is to avoid being bitten so:

- Cover up if going out a night with loose fitting clothing with long sleeves and trousers (mosquitoes can bite through tight fitting clothes)
- Use insect repellents on exposed skin; clothes can be sprayed with insect repellent too. DEET-based insect repellents are strongly recommended (not for infants under the age of two months). An adult should apply the repellent to the child's skin. The manufacturer's instructions should be followed when using these products for babies or children.
- Doors, windows and other possible mosquito entry points to sleeping accommodation should be screened with fine mesh netting. If camping or sleeping in unscreened accommodation always use insecticide treated mosquito nets – remember to check the net for holes
- Knockdown insecticide spray should be used to kill resting mosquitoes in a room
- Where electricity is available use an electrically heated device to vapourise a mat (tablet) containing a synthetic pyrethroid in the room. A new mat is needed each night
- Garlic, Vitamin B, yeast extract and ultrasound devices DO NOT prevent bites

MALARIA

Malaria occurs in over 100 countries in Sub Saharan Africa, South East Asia, Central and South America, the Indian sub-continent and Australasia. Unless precautions are taken, anyone travelling to a country where malaria is present is at risk. Even if you and your family have lived in the country previously, you can still catch malaria. Malaria is a serious illness caused by infection of the red blood cells by a parasite called Plasmodium which is transmitted by mosquitoes. The mosquito bite injects the malaria parasite into the blood and one bite can cause malaria.

Children are at particular risk of severe and fatal malaria. The Health Protection Agency advises parents against taking babies and young children to malarious areas. If travel is unavoidable the baby or child should receive the appropriate anti-malarials and be well protected against mosquito bites. It is important that the child completes the full course of anti-malarials under parental supervision. Be aware that following these guidelines still does not guarantee complete protection. Children with malaria can become critically ill very quickly. Carers (parents, child minders, school teachers etc) should be made aware that these children need medical attention and a malaria blood test without delay if they become unwell within a year of leaving a malarious area

THE ABCD RULE

Anti-malarial medicines are not 100% effective against malaria and should be taken along with good travel health practice. Follow the ABCD rule:

A – be **A**ware of the risk

B – reduce **B**ites from the infected mosquito

C – use the appropriate **C**hemoprophylaxis (anti-malarial medication)

D – prompt **D**iagnosis following any flu-like symptoms

Different anti-malarials are advised for different parts of the world – discuss this with your practice nurse, GP or pharmacist. Make sure children start taking their antimalarials before travelling, take their medication regularly and complete the full course as advised by your practice nurse, GP or pharmacist. Make sure that you get your anti-malarials from a reputable UK source before you travel. Anti-malarials bought in the tropics may be fake and it is inadvisable to buy them over the internet.

ANIMAL BITES

Rabies is a risk in many parts of the world and is always fatal if left untreated. Follow these rules:

- Make sure your child does not touch any animals, including cats and dogs
- If the child is licked on broken skin or bitten in a country which has rabies clean the wound well with soap and running water for at least five minutes and apply an antiseptic such as iodine or alcohol
- Seek medical help immediately even if you have been immunised against rabies

SUN AND HEAT

Sun and heat stroke can cause serious problems for children. Keep babies under 9 months out of direct sunlight and protect children to avoid sunburn and heat stroke

- Use sunblock with an adequate SPF (at least factor 15). Reapply frequently and after swimming and washing
- Cover up with long sleeved, loose clothing and a hat with a wide brim
- Stay in the shade and avoid going out during the hottest part of the day
- Make sure your child drinks extra fluids

Too much sun can cause sunburn, heat exhaustion, skin irritation and heat stroke, especially in the very young.

SWIMMING

Well chlorinated water is safer than swimming in fresh water. Swimming in fresh water lakes and streams in Africa, South America and some parts of the Caribbean is not safe as there is a risk of catching bilharzia – a parasitic disease. Some diseases can be caught from sand and soil so make sure your child wears protective footwear when walking outside – including on the beach.

ACCIDENTS

Travellers die every year in swimming and traffic accidents so take these precautions:

- Never dive into water where the depth is uncertain
- Only swim in safe water – check currents, tides and the risk of jelly fish and sharks
- If hiring a car check its road worthiness and make sure you are insured
- Know where the emergency facilities are

INSURANCE

Ensure you have adequate insurance cover for your holiday. Make sure you inform the insurance company of any pre-existing medical condition such as diabetes or asthma.

EUROPEAN HEALTH INSURANCE CARD (EHIC)

The EHIC has replaced the old E111 and entitles you to reduced cost, sometimes free, medical treatment that becomes necessary while in a European Economic Area country or Switzerland. The easiest way to get a EHIC is to apply online – go to www.dh.gov.uk and follow the links

USEFUL WEBSITES

www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk

www.nathnac.org

www.fco.gov.uk/travel

www.malariahotspots.co.uk

www.masta.org

www.immunisation.nhs.uk

www.malaria-reference.co.uk

REFERENCES:

HEALTH PROTECTION AGENCY (2007) Guidelines for Malaria Prevention in Travellers from the United Kingdom London HPA

<http://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk> accessed 22:4:07

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