



It's that time of year where thousands of families prepare to set off for their holidays in the UK and abroad. To help minimise the risk of children and parents acquiring infections on holiday, we would like to remind you of some simple tips you can follow to avoid illnesses such as diarrhoea over the summer months.

While diarrhoea can be something of a nuisance, it is most often a short and self-limiting illness. It can however ruin a trip, causing distress particularly where individuals must cope with the illness in an unfamiliar environment or with basic toilet facilities. There are also some more serious forms of travellers' diarrhoea that can require treatment on return and cause longer-term problems. The mainstay of advice regarding travellers' diarrhoea is prevention. The principles of prevention include:

- **Washing your hands** – is the simplest but most effective way of preventing infection at home or on holiday. Always remember to wash your hands before handling or eating food and after using the toilet. Hand washing facilities may be poor or unavailable when on holiday, so always carry hand wipes or alcohol gel (although these are not a substitute for hand washing). Young children who cannot carry out effective hand hygiene for themselves should be supervised at all times.
- **The safety of tap water** – cannot be guaranteed in many countries. To avoid illness water should only be drunk when you are sure of its purity; this also applies to water used for making ice cubes and cleaning teeth. Boiling water is the most effective method of purification and it can be stored in a covered container until needed. Boiling local water for teas and coffees is usually safe as is bottled water.
- **Food** – can also be a source of illness but some simple measures can be used to reduce the risks of eating contaminated food:
 - **unpasteurised milk** should not be drunk; local cheese and ice cream are often made from unpasteurised milk
 - **meat** should be freshly prepared, thoroughly cooked and eaten hot; leftovers or food that may have been out in the air for any length of time should be avoided
 - **fish and shellfish** can be hazardous at certain times of the year, even if well cooked, when in doubt it is best to avoid
 - **vegetables** should ideally be eaten when thoroughly cooked
 - **salads** should be avoided as these are easily contaminated by soil or flies and are difficult to clean
 - **food should be covered** to protect it from flies and other insects which can cause disease; fruit should be peeled as the skin can be easily contaminated

- **Pre-travel health advice** – should ideally be sought from your GP at least 6 to 8 weeks before travel as **vaccinations** for illnesses such as **hepatitis A** may be required. However, it is never too late to seek advice when booking last minute deals. It is also important to ensure usual childhood vaccinations such as those for measles and meningitis are up to date before travel.
- **Swimming in a pool** – is a huge part of a holiday especially for young children but there are things you can do to protect yourself and other swimmers from germs. Never swim if you have diarrhoea, as germs causing tummy upsets can easily be transmitted in water. Always remember to wash your hands after you have been to the toilet. Shower with soap before entering a pool, rinse yourself off afterwards and try to avoid swallowing the water you swim in.
- **Visiting animal attractions** – is fun for children but can never be free from risk. Despite looking clean and healthy, animals naturally carry a wide range of bacteria, some of which may cause ill health if passed to humans. To avoid infections wash your hands with soap and water after contact with animals or their surroundings (taking care to supervise young children); eat and drink in designated areas only, and do not allow children to kiss the animals.
- **Touching animals when abroad** – should be done with caution, as some countries have a significant problem with rabies. Advice can be sought from your GP before travel as to whether a vaccination may be advised. Avoiding contact with animals and discouraging children from petting, stroking or feeding animals is important. If a bite occurs, carry out immediate first aid (flush with large amounts of running water but do not scrub, apply alcohol or iodine as available) and always seek medical advice as soon as possible.
- **Insect/mosquito bites** – spread many infections and few can be prevented by vaccination or medication. The best ways to prevent insect borne infections are to use clothing as protection, use reliable and tested insect repellent and sleep under a mosquito net if available. Other methods include keeping doors and windows shut at night and using plug-in devices, although these are not greatly effective.

By following these simple tips, hopefully your trip will be incident free. If any member of your family returns with an illness particularly fever, diarrhoea with blood or mucus or vomiting that persists, they should see their GP, where a stool sample may be required. People with diarrhoea and/or vomiting should not return to school/work until they are symptoms free for at least 48 hours.

For further information on any of the advice above, useful websites include:

- **PHE:** www.gov.uk/phe
- **NHS Choices:** www.nhs.uk
- **National Travel Health Network & Centre (NaTHNaC):**
<http://travelhealthpro.org.uk>
- **Travel Health Guidance for schools:** www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk