



Travel

MEDICINE

by Dena Braun

Here's Your Ticket to an Illness-Free Vacation

When you're paging through a glossy travel brochure, or researching your dream vacation online, the furthest thing from your mind is one of the most important—staying healthy. No matter where you're traveling—be it a foreign country, an island getaway or a campsite in the mountains—there's plenty to do to ensure that your vacation is a healthy one. Make yourself aware and be prepared, and you stand a greater chance of having a fantastic holiday.

air

Air travel poses some unique challenges in avoiding illness. But despite what most people think, planes actually have good air filtration systems.

"It's not the bad air; it's the sick people," says Dr. Michael Zimring, director of the Center for Travel and Wilderness Medicine at Mercy Hospital in Baltimore. "If someone is coughing and sick, the chances that you'll get sick depend on your proximity and length of time near the source. It would take 15 to 20 minutes for the infected air to reach you if you were very near the person, but if it's in a different part of the plane, it could take hours."

Since you can't control the other passengers, your best bet is to fortify yourself by being well rested before the flight, remaining well hydrated throughout the flight and taking a product like Airborne to beef up your immune

system. If you're extremely germ-phobic, Zimring suggests wearing a mask and opening restroom doors with a towel.

On long flights, it's imperative to get up and walk around frequently to avoid deep vein thrombosis, otherwise known as economy class syndrome. The condition, which involves blood clots forming in the veins of the lower leg, is serious and can be potentially fatal.

When traveling, the compressed, dry air in the aircraft's cabin can cause blood to detach from the walls of a vein, and the condition does not discriminate among sex, age or physical condition. Some easy ways to prevent economy class syndrome are to stay hydrated during the flight, and to get up and walk around whenever possible to increase blood flow. Taking aspirin before and during the flight may also help.

The malady can result in tragedy. For example, London's Heathrow Airport reports that on average one passenger dies from economy class syndrome a month.

As a public service, ameswalker.com, a compression hosiery retailer, has developed a podcast with upper body and leg exercises to help prevent blood clots from forming. Those interested can download it at economyclasssyndrome.net and take it with them on flights.

There's also the issue of prescription medication on flights. New security standards on U.S. flights restrict all gels and liquids from passengers' carry-on items. Medication is allowed, provided that the printed name on the label matches that of the passenger,

along with other essential medication, such as insulin. Be sure to check the latest security measures before you leave to assure that you have the needed medication properly secured.

sea

Cruise ships have received lots of bad press recently due to outbreaks of norovirus. Since the bacterium is passed through touch, hand washing is your best defense. Be obsessive about it—wash your hands before and after eating and smoking, after using the restroom and even after touching your face. Experts also advise avoiding the buffet, or at the very least, only taking hot foods that are dished out by the staff.

And since germs travel quickly in the confines of a cruise ship, leave any area immediately if it's apparent that someone else is sick. All it takes is a few germs in the air to land on a handrail, a chair or even your face for your vacation to take a nasty setback. If you do feel you're coming down with something, rehydrate yourself with plenty of water and keep medication for traveler's diarrhea nearby.

While seasickness has been reduced thanks to enhancement in ship stability technology, it can still be an issue for some travelers. Passengers who experience the nausea and dizziness

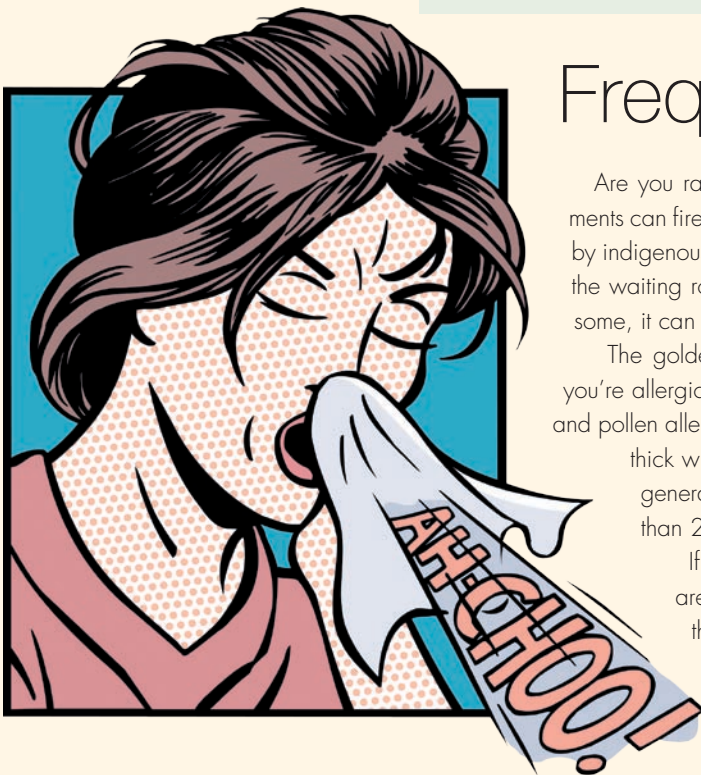
“All it takes is a few germs in the air to land on a handrail, a chair or even your face for your vacation to take a nasty setback.”

Frequent Sneezer?

Are you racking up the Kleenex as fast as the reward points? Strange environments can fire up allergies like a nuclear reactor—not to mention the problems posed by indigenous foods and plants. Every year, many vacationers spend time exploring the waiting rooms of emergencies rooms or chained to a box of Kleenex, and for some, it can be even worse.

The golden rule: If you've never been to where you're going, find out what you're allergic to. That way, you'll know what to avoid. For people who suffer dust and pollen allergies, it is ideal to check the local weather reports to see if the place is thick with allergens. A pretty safe bet is surfing or skiing. Ocean breezes are generally devoid of allergens and dust mites don't thrive at elevations greater than 2,500 feet.

If traveling abroad, schedule a visit with an immunologist to see if there are vaccinations that could keep you snuffle free, and get a refresher on those allergy shots. If you're going to be there for several weeks, it would be wise to request prescription pills to take along with you.



“It’s best to leave a copy of your itinerary with someone you trust. And be sure to include your expected departure and arrival dates, the make, model and year of your car, possible contacts in your vacation area and a weather forecast.”

associated with motion sickness are encouraged to use Dramamine or ginger pills. Fresh air, remaining hydrated and avoiding greasy foods also help reduce seasickness.

Plan ahead before booking your ship. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention maintains a report card for most cruise ships on cleanliness and safety, and if you begin to feel ill before your trip, call your travel agent or the company to see if you can alter your plans without penalty. If you purchase cancellation insurance, however, this shouldn’t be an issue.

land

If you’re just planning a weekend getaway or a camping trip for the family, there’s plenty to remember for safety, whether you’re traveling in an RV or hiking into the sky.

When planning your route, keep in mind any closings or permits required. If you’re hopping from campsite to campsite, make a list of available telephones and ranger stations nearby. Track down the advanced weather forecast and plan on making any changes to your trip if severe weather looms.

Be aware of potentially dangerous vegetation in the area. Millions of Americans each year fall victim to the effects of poison ivy, oak and sumac. Keep tabs on what plant life exists in the area and the basic shape and texture of poisonous plants. Touching the leaves or vines or even burning them can lead to a quick infection that can last for days, and in severe cases, years. Fortunately, a new lotion called büji Block has been proven to help prevent catching poison ivy, oak and sumac. The lotion helps block urushiol, the toxic chemical that causes the itching and blistering.

Make sure that all of your equipment, including tents, lanterns, stoves, flashlights and flares, are in top shape and ready for use. And keep your skills sharp—if you haven’t traveled in some time, you may need to remember how to read a compass or set up a shelter in case of an emergency.

Of course, it’s best to leave a copy of your itinerary and contact information with someone you trust.

Dena Braun is a freelance writer who lives in Scottsdale, Ariz., and also writes for Tennis Magazine and Thunderbird Magazine.



Is Your Coverage Bilingual?

Before you break out the passport, dig up your insurance forms.

“It’s the most important thing for travel,” says Dr. Michael Zimring, director of the Center for Travel and Wilderness Medicine at Mercy Hospital in Baltimore. “You should have it because most health insurance companies won’t cover you overseas. You may think they do, but they don’t and Medicare doesn’t cover you.”

Before you travel, check with your insurance company to determine if you’re covered internationally. If you are covered, you need to find out if they will pay a foreign provider directly, or if you are required to pay upfront and submit bills for reimbursement. Doctor and hospital bills in First World countries can be on par with costs in the United States, so even if you have coverage, you may be forced to pay many thousands of dollars upfront. If you need to be evacuated, costs start at \$20,000 and quickly go up.

For travel medical information and resources, including information on immunizations required for specific countries, visit cdc.gov/travel.