

Pre-Travel Medical Consultation

Travel Medicine has become a very important aspect of both business and leisure travel. What vaccines should you receive? Are there certain medications you should take? Are there diseases or preventative measures you should address before traveling to a foreign country? These are all valid questions and concerns. At Medfirst, our practice dedicates its time and resources to provide the most accurate and current recommendations in accordance with the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) guidelines. Our goals are to educate the traveler, assist in prevention, and foster an overall safe and healthy travel experience. We do this by providing medical counsel, immunizations and discussion regarding medication usage, both preventative and self-treatment, as indicated.

Pre-Travel consultation is strongly encouraged 4-6 weeks prior to travel. We are aware there are circumstances when foreign travel may be required with little notice, and we make every effort to see you and provide the services you need promptly, realizing on occasion this means our team coming to your place of business. At Medfirst, we make every effort to see you the same day and generally keep our wait time to less than 15 minutes. During the pre-travel consultation a medical history will be obtained, including information about your current medications, travel itinerary, vaccination requirements and preventative measures. Additionally, a discussion about common concerns and situations routinely includes traveler's diarrhea, jet lag, respiratory infection and insect related illnesses.

Vaccinations and medication recommendations vary depending on your area of travel, medical history, current medications and potential exposures. It is also important to consider your mode(s) of transportation, whether it be land, sea or air, which may present various concerns regarding altitude mountain sickness (AMS), motion sickness, jet lag and heat or cold exposure. Additionally, unique circumstances such as cruises, water excursions, wilderness trips, rural areas and altitude play a specific role in recommendations to ensure safe and healthy travel while abroad. For acclimatization to higher altitudes, usually around 1500-3500 meters, recommendations are for a 3-4 day adjustment before ascending to higher altitudes (Paralihar, 2010). Jet lag commonly occurs when crossing two or more time zones, and is frequently associated with disruption of sleep and wake cycles. Traveling westward is generally associated with early sleepiness and awakening, while eastward travel is more commonly associated with difficulty falling asleep and waking. The adjustment time is generally $\frac{1}{2}$ - 1 day for each time zone crossed (Brunette, 2014).

Prevention and precautions will help you avoid potential complications and reduce the risk of disease during your travel. One main concern is the food and water you consume. As always, hand washing is paramount and recommendations are to use soap and bottled water. Avoid using tap water for washing and drinking. A good guideline is “boil it, cook it, peel it or forget it” (WHO, 2014). Remember to wash and peel fruit yourself. Another way to be proactive is with possible exposure to insect related illness. It is important to consider repellent spray, long sleeves, head gear; it is also wise to avoid peak times of the day, such as daylight periods for mosquitoes causing dengue fever, and dawn and dusk for those causing malaria. Parasites can be transmitted via food, water or the ground. Risks can be reduced further by wearing closed toed shoes, and avoiding going barefoot or wading in fresh or stagnant water (Brunette, 2014).

There are a variety of situations when medications might be indicated, but you need to take into account potential side effects, adverse reactions, interactions and proper usage. Traveler’s diarrhea is one of the most frequently encountered infections. The above recommendations certainly hold true for food borne illness. Also, it may not be as important what you eat as where you eat. A common area of discussion during pre-travel consultation is the use of antibiotics both for prevention and self-treatment. “At this time, prophylactic antibiotics should not be recommended for most travelers...offer no protection against nonbacterial pathogens and can remove normally protective micro flora from the bowel” (Brunette, 2014). Additionally, most of the infections you encounter are likely self-limiting or viral and antibiotics are not advantageous. In the event antibiotics are recommended, fluoroquinolones are a good choice because they provide coverage against bacteria commonly associated with infectious diarrhea, respiratory, skin and urinary tract infections. Jet lag is another condition in which medication usage is routinely discussed. The general recommendation is to consider using non-addictive or alternative sleep aides during the adjustment period and when travel involves durations of more than a couple of days and two or more time zones (Harms, 2013).

There are other aspects of traveling abroad that may not be as commonly discussed, but are still important to consider. Some of these topics include cultural differences, language translation, money exchanges, mode of travel, methods of communication and perception of foreign travelers. It is important to consider leaving a copy of your itinerary with family or friends at home and with those you may be visiting abroad. Additional considerations are copies of important documents and current photos. Two other things to be mindful of, based on your travel plans and level of excursions, include travel health insurance and evacuation insurance (Brunette, 2014).

The ultimate goals of pre-travel counseling are to reduce risks and avoid disease while fostering safe, healthy and fun travel. At Medfirst, we have aligned our practice with the International Society of Travel Medicine and their global resources to help ensure each patient receives the best and most current recommendations. We believe our more than 30 years of medical experience providing medical services to companies of all sizes, from locally owned to Fortune 500, uniquely qualifies Medfirst to be your first choice when traveling abroad.

References:

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