

Thing to keep in mind when traveling overseas with children

Heading overseas on a family vacation can be an exciting experience for children of all ages.

Prior to travel, parents should make sure they are well-equipped to handle the health care needs of children, especially when heading to a developing country. Half of all travelers to developing countries will experience a health problem, and 8000 will require the attention of a physician each month, according to the *Journal of Infectious Diseases*.

Parents should make certain they have packed appropriate medications and equipment. Traveling with youngsters who have asthma, allergies (including food allergy), diabetes and other chronic conditions requires preparation. Appropriate converters to use in international electrical outlets should be packed when bringing nebulizers and other electrical equipment.

Before the vacation, parents also should ensure the entire family is current on immunizations and visit with their pediatrician to discuss other necessary medications and immunizations (e.g., antimalaria drugs for travel to tropical areas or rabies immunization for those traveling to areas with bats and unvaccinated dogs and cats).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advises travelers abroad to pack over-the-counter medications and supplies that might not be readily available or accessible at the travel destination. Such supplies include:

- age-appropriate pain relievers,
- cold medications,
- antacid liquid or tablets,
- insect repellent,
- sunscreen,
- hydrocortisone cream,
- infant care needs (e.g., diapers, wipes, formula, baby food),
- tweezers, scissors and a thermometer, and
- bandages.

Because U.S. travelers to developing countries can be susceptible to traveler's diarrhea, experts advise families to avoid consuming raw, uncooked food, including salad bars and cold buffets, fruit and vegetables that cannot be peeled, food from street vendors and tap water. Safer snacks for children include packaged cereals, bread and pasta, bottled water and pasteurized juices and dairy products.

Sanitation and health standards in other countries might vary, so parents are encouraged to have children frequently wash hands thoroughly with soap and water, or use hand sanitizer gel when soap and water are not available.

Upon return to the United States, parents who have questions about symptoms such as fever, chills, sweating, persistent diarrhea and weight loss should call their child's pediatrician.

-Trisha Koriath
July 2007, American Academy of Pediatrics