

Advice for the Traveler

Whether you're taking a short weekend getaway or traveling to a remote corner of the world, it is important you take certain steps to ensure your trip is as enjoyable as possible. Often the standards of safety, cleanliness, and medical care are not the same in foreign countries as here in Canada, increasing your risk for travel-related illnesses and accidents. With the right amount of knowledge and preparation you can play a big role in minimizing these risks.

When preparing for a trip, your first step should be to book a consultation with your healthcare provider to receive an individualized health assessment. The risk of becoming ill while traveling depends on many factors, such as your age, immunization status, pre-existing medical conditions, destination, length of stay, and type of accommodations. A healthcare professional will assess these factors and determine if you require any immunizations (hepatitis A & B, typhoid, etc.) or preventative medications (against malaria, stomach illness, etc.), in addition to providing you with some health-related advice. In the past this process was typically done with a family physician or a registered nurse in a travel clinic. Now however, with certain pharmacists completing training programs to provide immunizations, you can book a travel consultation at select community pharmacies. Available for extended hours, pharmacists are one of the most accessible healthcare providers, making them a valuable alternative to address your health-related needs prior to traveling abroad. It is important that you book your travel consultation at least six weeks before your trip, as various vaccines and preventative medications take time to start working.

When traveling, you must consider that you may be at risk for a number of vaccine-preventable diseases. This risk typically increase with age as our immunity begins to decline. During your pre-travel assessment your immunization history will be reviewed to determine if you require any vaccinations. The need for certain vaccinations will also depend on where you plan to travel, and what types of activities you plan to undertake. Take for instance the need to receive yellow fever immunization to gain entry into certain countries, and the need to receive typhoid immunization if you plan to stay in small villages of certain countries.

Although some diseases may be prevented through the use of vaccines, others may require different measures to prevent their occurrence. You may need to take preventative medications or take other precautions. Take for instance illnesses that are transmitted through contaminated food and water. Some helpful ways to protect yourself include eating food that has been well cooked, drinking only water that is boiled or bottled, avoiding ice unless made with purified water, avoiding food from street vendors, and brushing your teeth with bottled water. It is important to remember "boil it, cook it, peel it, or leave it!"

As the role of Canadian pharmacists continues to evolve, new opportunities are becoming available. Being one of the most accessible healthcare professionals, pharmacists as travel consultants will definitely improve public access to this service, complementing what is already being provided by family physicians and travel clinics. If you have any questions or would like to book a consultation, be sure to contact your certified immunization pharmacists at Ryan's Pharmacy in Nackawic, or at The Medicine Shoppe Pharmacy in the Fredericton Co-Op. Remember your health is our number one priority!

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