



Health guide for travellers



Introduction

In recent years, the number of Singaporeans travelling overseas has increased tremendously. Whether you travel for business, studies or leisure, you will want to keep your trip free from sickness. With a little preparation, you can make your travelling experience an enjoyable and healthy one.





Before your trip



Visit your doctor

- Consult your doctor about the vaccinations required and the special health concerns of those places you will be visiting. It is best to see your doctor at least 4-6 weeks before departure. This is to allow time to complete your vaccination and for your body to develop full protection. Also, certain vaccines cannot be given together.
- Ask your doctor for a letter if you are unable to take any of the required vaccinations for medical reasons e.g. allergies, pregnancy.
- If you have a long-term medical condition (like high blood pressure, diabetes or asthma), ask your doctor to prescribe enough medicine to last the whole trip. He will also advise you of any special precautions to take.





A+

Always carry a health card with the following information:

- Your blood group
- Any allergies to medicines or foods
- Your vaccination record
- A brief medical record
- A list of your medicines and their doses
- Name and contact of your regular doctor
- Name and contact of person to notify in case of an emergency

Ask your doctor to help you prepare this card.

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Prepare A First Aid Kit

Ask your doctor to help you put together a first aid kit to bring with you. Depending on your needs and travel plans, you may wish to include the following items:

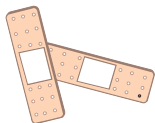
Oral Medication

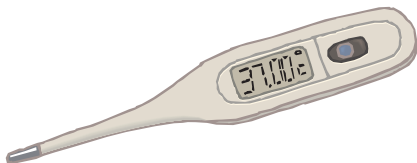
- Anti-fever pills
- Mild painkillers
- Anti-motion sickness pills
- Anti-diarrhoea pills
- Anti-histamines
(for runny nose and mild allergies)
- Lozenges (for sore throat)



Items for External Use

- Antiseptic solution or cream - for cuts and grazes
- Calamine lotion - for skin rashes and insect bites
- Cotton wool/cotton buds - for applying medicine
- Gauze - for cleaning wounds





- Plasters, adhesive dressings - for dressing small wounds
- Adhesive tape - for holding dressings
- Forceps - for removing splinters or stings
- Scissors - for cutting gauze
- Thermometer - for measuring body temperature

Do not forget to include an insect repellent and a sunscreen or sunblock lotion with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15 if you are going to spend a lot of time outdoors.





Should You Be Travelling?

Flying in a pressurised aircraft may pose a health risk to people with health problems.

Avoid travelling if you:

- Have a severe chronic lung disease
- Have had a recent heart attack or stroke (within 4-6 weeks)
- Are recuperating from a minor surgical operation e.g. laparoscopic surgery (within 7 days)
- Are severely anaemic (i.e. your haemoglobin level is less than 7g%)
- Are in the late stages of pregnancy (beyond 35 weeks)
- Have a severe middle ear or sinus infection
- Have a contagious or communicable disease
- Have been scuba-diving within 24 hours of flying

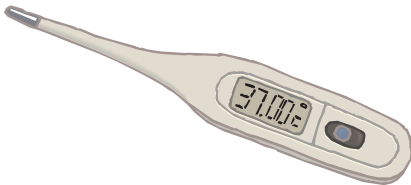
If you have any of these conditions and need to fly, please consult your doctor and the airline you intend to fly with for medical clearance.



Taking Precautions Against SARS

You should check Ministry of Health's website at www.moh.gov.sg for updates on SARS if you need to travel to an area with an active local spread of SARS. You should take the following precautions:

- Be aware of the main symptoms of SARS, e.g. high fever ($>38\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$), cough or breathing difficulty and seek medical attention as soon as possible with the onset of these symptoms.
- If you are travelling to temperate countries during their winter period, it is advisable to get yourself vaccinated against influenza as influenza symptoms may be confused with that of SARS.
- Do not travel if you are unwell and postpone your trip until you have recovered.
- Find out where are the established hospitals in that country in case of an emergency.
- Eat and rest well before and during your trip to boost your immunity.
- Bring along a thermometer.





During travel



Prevent Infectious Diseases

Infectious diseases are diseases caused by living organisms like viruses and bacteria. They can be passed from person to person through body secretions, insects, or other means. Examples are SARS, influenza, the common cold, tuberculosis (TB), Hepatitis A and B.

- Practice good personal hygiene by washing your hands thoroughly and frequently with soap and water. Use an alcohol hand rub if there are no washing facilities.
- Avoid touching someone else's respiratory secretions, wet tissues or handkerchiefs.
- Avoid crowded places.
- Avoid close contact with anyone who looks unwell.
- Avoid sharing eating utensils, towels and bedding with others.
- Use a serving spoon when eating from a common plate.
- Monitor your health closely. Seek medical attention if you feel unwell.



Prevent Common Travel Problems

Motion Sickness

Motion sickness occurs when your brain receives too many mixed signals from your eyes and the balance organs in your ears.

To prevent or minimise motion sickness:

- Ask your doctor to prescribe anti-motion sickness tablets or skin patches. These usually need to be taken or applied one to several hours before departure.
- While travelling in a vehicle, aircraft or ship, take slow, deep breaths. Try to face forward and look at a distant stationary object. Avoid concentrating on nearby objects such as reading a book.
- Avoid physical discomfort e.g. cold draughts or unpleasant smells.
- Keep your mind occupied by doing something (e.g. chatting with the person next to you) or just sleep it off.

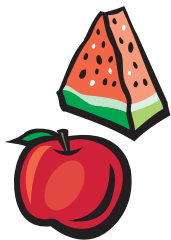


Jet Lag

When you travel to a vastly different time zone, you may find it difficult to stay awake in the daytime but have trouble sleeping at night. This is called jet lag and results from a change to your body's normal sleep-wake cycle when you travel across time zones.

To minimise the effects of jet lag:

- Try to eat and sleep according to the local time at your destination as soon as you can.



- If you are travelling when it would be night at your destination, try to spend as much time as possible asleep. Take a mild sleeping pill to help you sleep.
- If you are flying during what would be daylight at your destination, try to remain awake. Get up and walk around the cabin or do stretching exercises in your seat.
- Drink plenty of water or fruit juice to prevent dehydration, which can worsen jet lag.
- Avoid alcoholic and caffeinated drinks.
- Do not overeat or smoke during your journey.
- Take melatonin which may help minimise jet lag.



- Do not plan too many activities on your first day of arrival.
- If you arrive in the day,
 - ✓ Take a walk outdoors in the sun. This will help reset your biological clock more quickly.
 - ✓ Continue your exercise programme. This will help you keep awake in the day and tire you out for a more restful sleep at night.
 - ✓ Avoid napping, as this will delay your body's adjustment to the new time zone. If you must, limit your nap to no more than one hour.



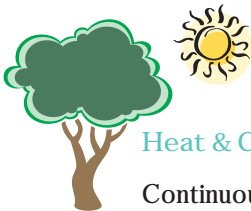


Sunburn

Sunburn results from over exposure to strong sunlight. The skin becomes red, tender and blistered. Too much sunlight can also cause premature wrinkles and increase the risk of skin cancer later in life especially for children less than 15 years of age. To minimise the harmful effects of too much sunlight:

- Avoid or limit exposure to strong sunlight especially during the hottest part of the day (late morning to early afternoon). Take special care with children and babies with pale skin.
- Wear a wide-brimmed hat, long sleeves, trousers, and sunglasses.
- Use a sunscreen or sunblock of at least SPF15 on all exposed parts of the body.
- Use a moisturiser and lip balm when necessary, especially in a dry climate.





Heat & Cold Exposures

Continuous exposure to extreme temperatures can result in serious medical complications and even death.

To prevent heat exposures:

- Drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration.
- Have enough rest.
- Stay in shaded areas and avoid the midday sun especially in the tropics.

To prevent cold exposures:

- Put on sufficient warm clothing to prevent hypothermia or abnormally low body temperature ($< 35^{\circ}\text{C}$) and frostbite.
- Protect exposed areas and extremities (fingers and toes) by wearing a hat, ear muffs, gloves, thick socks and suitable shoes or boots.
- Avoid wet clothing.
- Don't drink alcohol or smoke.





Mountain/Altitude Sickness

Altitude sickness occurs when you reach a high altitude in a short time. This happens especially at an altitude of more than 2000m above sea level. Symptoms include headache, sleep disturbance, fatigue, shortness of breath, dizziness, nausea or vomiting.

To prevent altitude sickness, it is important to give your body time to acclimatise to changes in oxygen level, air pressure and temperature.

- Take it easy the first day.
- Once you are 3000m above sea level, limit your altitude increment by 300m per day. You should rest one extra day for every 900m climbed.
- Take in sufficient fluids to avoid dehydration.
- Avoid alcohol, tobacco and depressant drugs like sleeping pills.
- Wear sufficient warm clothing to prevent hypothermia.
- The best treatment for altitude sickness is to descend to a lower altitude. In severe cases, it will be necessary to seek medical treatment.



Prevent travel diseases

Food & Water Borne Diseases

Eating food or drinking water contaminated with germs can cause:

- Traveller's diarrhoea
- Typhoid
- Cholera
- Hepatitis A



What You Can Do

- Avoid undercooked meat and seafood especially shellfish.
- Eat only food that has been properly cooked and is still hot when served.
- Drink only bottled water or water that has been boiled or disinfected with chlorine.
- Avoid salads, peeled fruit, unpasteurised milk, ice-cream and ice cubes.



Mosquito Borne Diseases

Mosquitoes can transmit diseases like:

- Malaria
- Dengue haemorrhagic fever
- Yellow fever
- Japanese B encephalitis



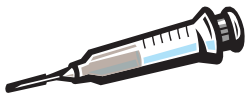
What You Can Do

- Wear light-coloured, long-sleeved clothing and long pants, especially when outdoors at night.
- Apply insect repellent to all exposed skin. Repeat the application (according to the manufacturer's instructions) as the repellent wears off.
- If your bedroom is not air-conditioned, sleep under a mosquito net or in a room where the windows are fitted with fine wire netting. Light a mosquito coil before going to bed.





- Get yourself vaccinated against yellow fever and Japanese encephalitis if you are travelling to areas where these diseases are common.
- If you are going to countries where malaria is common, ask your doctor for anti- malaria tablets. You will have to start taking these tablets before you go, continue throughout your trip and for a period after your return.
- There are no vaccines or preventive tablets for dengue haemorrhagic fever. Just take precautions to avoid mosquito bites in the day.





Blood Borne Diseases

Transfusion of infected blood or the use of non-sterile needles or other sharp instruments can transmit viruses that cause:

- AIDS
- Hepatitis B
- Hepatitis C
- Syphilis

What You Can Do

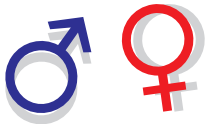
- Visit your own dentist before you leave home so that you won't need to seek dental treatment overseas.
- Take simple precautions (like wearing a seat belt and avoiding alcohol when driving) to prevent serious injuries which may lead to blood transfusions.
- If you need medical treatment while overseas, arrange with the local hospital to use only screened blood and sterile equipment.
- The hospital may be able to store your blood in advance for your own use later (autologous transfusion).
- Don't abuse drugs or share needles.
- When undergoing ear piercing, tattooing or acupuncture, always go to a reliable operator.



Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

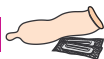
Diseases transmitted through sexual intercourse include:

- Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS)
- Gonorrhoea
- Syphilis
- Genital warts
- Genital herpes



AIDS is most often transmitted during casual sex between a man and a woman (heterosexual intercourse). You don't get AIDS from mosquitoes or other biting insects.

- Avoid casual sex. You cannot tell if a person is infected simply by looking at him or her. He or she may look normal.
- Many prostitutes are infected with AIDS. There are no 'safe' or 'virgin' prostitutes.
- People with STDs are more likely to become infected with AIDS. They are then more likely to pass the AIDS virus (HIV) to other people.



- Drinking alcohol will affect your judgement. You are more likely to take risks and get into casual sex.
- Condoms, if used properly, can reduce the risk of getting AIDS. But they cannot provide 100% protection. Also, reliable condoms may not always be readily available overseas.
- Oral contraceptive pills and other birth control methods do not provide any protection against AIDS.
- AIDS is a fatal disease. There is NO cure for AIDS. Secret potions and magic charms cannot protect you from AIDS.
- The best protection against AIDS and all other STDs is to avoid casual sex.





After travel



Visit Your Doctor

Consult your doctor after your trip if you:

- Feel unwell and have any of the symptoms listed in the following pages.
- Have been travelling for more than 3 months.
- Have been to rural areas, developing countries or a place with a recent epidemic of an infectious disease.
- Have been ill or been in contact with ill people during your trip.
- Have engaged in high risk activities overseas (e.g. visited prostitutes, shared needles).

Even if you feel well, you may choose to go for a post-travel check-up as some infections may have no symptoms or have very long incubation periods i.e. the time period from the first exposure to the germ to when symptoms first show up. The infected person may look and feel well during this period.



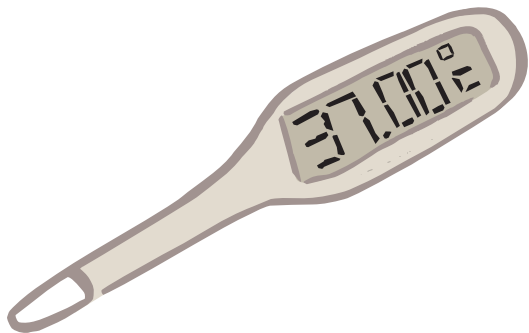
Returning from SARS affected areas

You should monitor your health and check your temperature daily for 10 days.

However, if you have:

- A fever above 38°C and
- A cough and/or breathing difficulties

Call 993 and an ambulance will be dispatched to bring you to Tan Tock Seng Hospital. Put on a surgical mask while waiting for the ambulance.





The incubation periods and symptoms of some common diseases are:

Disease	Incubation Period	Symptoms
Cholera	2 – 7 days	Vomiting, profuse painless watery diarrhoea
Dengue fever	5 – 7 days	Fever, headache, eye, joint & muscle pain, rash
Hepatitis A	20 – 60 days	Fever, nausea, fatigue, poor appetite, yellowing of eyes & skin, dark urine, pale stools
Japanese B encephalitis	5 – 10 days	Fever, chills, headache, tiredness, nausea, vomiting, confusion, fits, coma
Malaria	7 – 14 days	Fever, chills, shivering, headache, tiredness, vomiting yellowing of eyes & skin, dark urine



Disease	Incubation Period	Symptoms
Meningitis	Within 7 days	Fever, headache, vomiting, stiff neck, drowsiness, fits
Rabies	20 – 90 days	Fever, headache, itching/pain at site of bite, salivation, confusion, coma
SARS	2 – 10 days	High fever ($>38^{\circ}\text{C}$), cough, breathing difficulty
Typhoid	7 – 21 days	Fever, headache, constipation or diarrhoea, lack of appetite, rose coloured spots on body
Yellow fever	3 – 6 days	Fever, headache, vomiting, backache, yellowing of eyes & skin, bleeding of gums, blood in urine

