

<http://www.psa.org.au/selfcare>

Travel well, return safely

In Australia and New Zealand, when we are commemorating Anzac Day, many other countries will be focussing on one of the world's deadliest diseases. April 25 is also World Malaria Day.

Each year, malaria causes millions of preventable deaths - often women and children, and mostly in sub Saharan Africa, but also in parts of Asia, South and Central America, the Middle East and the Pacific Island Nations.

Adult permanent residents of the countries where the malaria (female *Anopheles*) mosquito lives and bites, can develop a degree of immunity to malaria - travellers do not!! So malaria is just one of the infectious diseases for which we need to take precautions for when we venture beyond the comparatively safe shores of our island continent.

Of course, mosquitoes spread other diseases, too. Dengue Fever and Ross River Fever are also prevalent in Australia; and are even more prevalent since the recent floods, which have lead to an explosion in breeding of the mosquitoes responsible for the transmission of these infections.

Clearly the way to avoid these infections is not to get bitten; something that it's almost impossible to guarantee despite our best attempts, but it is essential to try to minimise the risk.

Mosquito, sandfly, tsetse fly, tick and flea bites aside, there are quite a few other problems we may encounter - problems that are liable to make our holiday or business trip less than enjoyable.

Travellers' diarrhoea is the most common. Although not usually the most serious of the health problems a traveller will face, travellers' diarrhoea can cause extreme discomfort and disruption to our sightseeing or business meeting schedule. The solid dose anti-diarrhoea medicines in tablet or capsule form (like *Gastrostop* or *Imodium*) sometimes provide a quick fix, but sometimes only a temporary fix; and in any event, they are not suitable for children. It is essential to avoid dehydration, so oral rehydration solutions are the best solutions. *Hydralyte* and *Gastrolyte* are examples.

Prevention of travellers' diarrhoea is an even better option. Adherence to simple straight-forward hygiene procedures usually does the trick. Remember many infectious organisms are spread, not just by coughing, sneezing and spitting, but also by hand to hand contact and then hand to mouth. So the hand cleansing alcohol based gels are a useful addition to any first aid kit - not only when you're travelling.

DVT (deep venous thrombosis) is considered a risk for long haul airline travel. It use to be called "economy class syndrome", but of course, it's not just a concern for economy class passengers; in fact it's not just a concern for airline passengers. If you stay still long enough, you're at risk; whether you're in a plane, a bus, a train or sitting on the lounge settee watching the TV. Regular movement is the key to prevention of DVT. Compression stockings may help, but there is no evidence that low dose aspirin is of any benefit.

Travelling with medicines - prescription or non prescription - can sometimes be problematic. They should always be in original containers, clearly labelled. Take a photocopy of the prescriptions with you. This serves a double purpose: it confirms your legal right to carry the medicine in countries where this right might be challenged; and it makes getting a new supply of your medicine so much easier if the need arises. If you have a chronic medical condition such as asthma, epilepsy or diabetes, you are taking warfarin or you have a potentially serious allergy, you should consider wearing a *MedicAlert* bracelet.

Before you travel, get some travel advice from you local pharmacist. Ask for the *Travel Health* fact card. It's available from pharmacies around Australia providing the Pharmaceutical Society's Self Care health information. Log onto the website www.psa.org.au to find the nearest location.

Whether it's a business or pleasure trip, good preparation and planning can help make all those travel memories pleasant ones.