

FEATURE

Safe travel outside U.S. requires medical planning

By Patricia Zapor
Catholic News Service

The old television commercials about packing a bottle of Pepto-Bismol to stay healthy when traveling south of the U.S. border did not nearly cover the information that sojourners need.

While crossing borders throughout Europe and North America generally doesn't bring on any illness more serious than an upset stomach caused by adjusting to unfamiliar cuisine and water, booking travel to many parts of the world today means half a dozen or more vaccinations, courses of anti-malaria medication, water-purification tablets, emergency supplies of antibiotics and special insurance to cover medical treatment abroad. Oh, and don't forget to pack your own new needles and syringes, just in case.

A traveler with chronic medical problems also ought to carry backup supplies of medicines and copies of prescriptions, for instance. Anti-diarrhea medicine, antihistamines, antiseptic ointment and cold or flu treatments are a good idea for anyone visiting somewhere a little exotic.

Before you start packing that medical kit, though, start by finding out what preparations are recommended for the countries you're visiting.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov or toll-free, 888/FYI-TRIP) maintains lists of what precautionary vaccinations are required or suggested for travel to various countries. The Lonely Planet guidebooks or the Lonely Planet Web site (www.lonelyplanet.com) also list essential and recom-

mended medical precautions.

For example, a traveler to most anywhere in West Africa is required to have a yellow fever vaccination before the host countries will issue visitor's visas.

The CDC also recommends that travelers to West Africa be inoculated against: hepatitis A, typhoid, tetanus, polio, diphtheria and, sometimes, hepatitis B, rabies and meningitis.

Travelers planning to visit rural areas of East Asia needn't worry about yellow fever, but might consider a vaccine against Japanese encephalitis, as well as protection against cholera and typhoid.

Some of those vaccinations might be obtained from one's own doctor and are likely to be covered by health insurance. Others — such as yellow fever — require a trip to a clinic specializing in travel medicine, where a full series of shots could cost between \$400 to \$500. This is not an item to leave for the week before travel, either. Some vaccines require a series of shots over multiple visits, others need to be in your system for several weeks before they are effective.

Let's not forget about anti-malaria medicines, either. Malaria may have been eradicated in the United States and Europe but, in much of the rest of the world, it is still a very real, potentially fatal, danger.

There's no vaccine against malaria. Instead, doctors prescribe one of several prophylactic medicines, which are taken beginning a week or so before travel begins and continuing for several weeks after travelers return home.

The CDC notes that some strains of

Before Your Trip

1. See a travel medicine professional well before departure.
2. Review travel warnings on <http://travel.state.gov>
3. Put the international certificate of vaccination with your passport.
4. Make certain your medical and dental health is stable.
5. Know your medications and medical history.
6. Pack appropriate medications including antibiotics for traveler's diarrhea or any other infection you suspect.
7. Carry extra pairs of prescription glasses and or contact lenses.
8. Review your medical insurance and find out about coverage abroad.
9. Buy or create your own first-aid kit.
10. Pack nutritional bars.



malaria are resistant to certain of the available drugs, meaning you may be prescribed one medicine for travel to Africa, but a different one if your destination is South America. Many of the drugs are inappropriate for pregnant women.

Some, such as the convenient, once-a-week mefloquine, sold under the name Lariam, can have disconcerting side effects.

One group of American travelers in

Ghana devoted part of their breakfast conversation each morning to comparing their Lariam-exaggerated dreams — or nightmares — of the previous night. One reported dream encounters with chainsaw-wielding attackers that brought him to the breakfast table more in need of rest than he was the night before.

Next trip, he vowed, he'd be taking something else.

New book teaches kids water safety

A drowning accident that claimed the life of their 21-month-old son has prompted a Connecticut couple to make the promotion of water safety education for children and adults a priority.

In 1990, Kim and Stew Leonard Jr. started the Stew Leonard III Water Safety Foundation, created in memory of and

named after their son, who drowned during a family vacation in 1989 after venturing into a pool unnoticed. The foundation provides scholarships for swimming lessons and safety equipment through local YMCAs and Swim America, a nationally certified learn-to-swim program offered by the American Swimming Coaches Association.

The Leonards' latest effort to promote water safety education was to write a book, *Stewie the Duck Learns to Swim*. Written for children ages 2 to 6, the book teaches how to be safe near the water through the story of Stewie, a duck who wants to swim with the "big ducks," but is prevented from going in the water by his older sisters until he learns the rules of water safety.

In the fully-illustrated book, Stewie learns three main rules: learn to swim, always wear a life vest and have grown-ups watch you while you are in the pool. The rules are conveyed through a rhyming song (sung to the tune of *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*) that is repeated throughout the book.

The book, including a free narrated CD, is available for \$4.95 plus \$1.75 shipping and handling through Stew Leonard Jr.'s grocery store Web site at www.stewleonards.com or by calling 800/SAY-STEW (800/729-7839).



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