

# *Let's fly away, let's fly, let's fly away!*

When the travel bug bites, make sure it's only the travel bug that bites. Keep other germs at bay well before you head for your vacation. **Vernon Chan** will have the "bug spray" handy when his vacation comes around. Here's the instruction manual to go with it.



## THIS COULD BE YOU.

Of 100,000 travellers to the developing world in 1 month<sup>1</sup>:

- 50,000 will develop some sort of health problem during their trip
- 8,000 will see a physician
- 5,000 will be ill enough to have to stay in bed
- 1,100 will be incapacitated in their work either abroad or returning home
- 300 will have to be admitted to hospital either during their trip or upon their return
- 50 will have to be air evacuated
- 1 will travel to their final destination

It turns out that falling sick is a fairly predictable outcome when you're out seeing the world. And with more Singaporeans becoming adventurous travellers and choosing exotic, rural and off-beat locations, some caution is warranted.

## A CULTURAL EXCHANGE – OF GERMS

Falling ill in a foreign country has a comical quality to it – at least for the locals. For them, it's always the foreigner with the weak constitution who drops sick, even though he's been eating the same food, drinking the same water, and getting bitten by the same mosquitoes as everyone else has for the last 500 years.

It makes perfect sense, though, from a biological standpoint. In any given city, the native population has a certain immunity to native germs.

And coming from a country where these germs are unknown, a traveller is likely to lack the immunity necessary to make even the simple act of drinking water safe.

## “HAVE YOU PACKED THE ANTIBODIES, DEAR?”

It pays to do a little research about the vacation spot you've picked. Don't just stop at the travel brochures, though. It's fine to know where to visit, what to see, and what to eat – but you should also remember to check the country's health advisory for the stops along your itinerary.



MOST OF THE COMMON EXOTIC INFECTIONS TRAVELLERS FACE ARE REGIONAL DISEASES – THE MOST SERIOUS BEING YELLOW FEVER, MALARIA, DENGUE, AND TYPHOID FEVER.

Most of the common exotic infections travellers face are regional diseases – the most serious being yellow fever, malaria, dengue, and typhoid fever – all of which have nasty, vacation-ending symptoms (and yellow fever is not actually treatable).

In general, these set of diseases are endemic to the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia, equatorial Africa, and South America. Check and double check your vacation spots against the travel advisory for regional diseases, and get the appropriate set of vaccinations from your friendly neighbour doctor.

## “FLEW? BUT I HAVEN'T EVEN BOUGHT THE AIR TICKETS YET.”

Even if your destination isn't on the list vaccination-necessary travel countries, you might just want to get a jab for a rather common and usually non-lethal infection: the common flu.

During the last two months of the year, the incidence of influenza tends to escalate in the northern hemisphere. It's true that you may still get influenza even if you get vaccinated, due to the variety of strains of the virus, but you'll be protected against what the medical community considers to be the most likely and problematic strains of flu.

## EMERGENCY EXIT: DO NOT OPEN

Yet the most frequent problem travellers face is “traveller's diarrhoea”, which affects 30 to 60 % of travellers to developing countries.<sup>2</sup> In most cases, the culprit

is consumption of contaminated food or water, although rotavirus and Hepatitis A figure in some cases.

Since it is almost impossible to determine the safety of a foreign country's food or water, and even less acceptable to deny yourself of the gastronomic delights of international cuisine, you should practice some basic precautions, such as only consuming well-cooked, hot food and bottled or carbonated water. Also, avoid chewing on ice cubes made from tap water, and practice basic hand-washing hygiene.

More importantly, you should invest in a traveller's medical kit that contain oral rehydration salts in case you get a diarrhoea attack.

**"THERE'S SUCH A LOT OF WORLD TO C..."**

Before you begin your trip, you should already be boosting your Vitamin C intake to boost your immunity to repel common bacteria attacks such as colds. Your travel kit should contain also contain enough vitamin C to keep your health up during your trip. One popular and recommended brand you can try is Redoxon Vita Immune, which contains 1000mg of Vitamin C – about ten times your daily requirement.

**"UGH. I FEEL SO SICK..."**

Some kinds of sicknesses while travelling don't actually involve bacteria however. This is the

MOTION SICKNESS OCCURS WHEN THE NERVOUS SYSTEM RECEIVES CONFLICTING SIGNALS FROM THE INNER EAR, EYES, SKIN PRESSURE RECEPTORS AND MUSCLES AND JOINT RECEPTORS.

sensation of sickness you feel even before you arrive at your destination. When you're on the move, take this quick test to see if your body needs some help:

How you do feel when you travel?

- Nauseas
- Cold Sweat
- Vomiting
- Dizziness
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Increased salivation
- Paleness of skin

If you're ticked one or more of these, you've got motion sickness. Commonly called motion sickness, it is also exactly the same as sea-sickness, and car-sickness.

Motion sickness happens when senses of balance and equilibrium are affected. It occurs when the nervous system receives conflicting signals from the inner ear, eyes, skin pressure receptors and muscles and joint receptors. For example, in a flight cabin, you feel and hear but do not see the motion. Hence, the brain cannot reconcile and coordinate. Similarly, this happens when you read a book on a train or in a car.

Lucky for some, the distressing symptoms of motion sickness stop when motion stops. However, there are people who continue to suffer the discomfort even after the journey.

Motion sickness can also be psychologically induced. Anticipation of movement can cause anxiety, fear and symptoms of motion sickness. This is likely to occur if you've had previous experience of motion sickness.

You can however put short shrift to feeling sick no matter whether you're up in the air, rolling on the road or sailing across the high seas. There are medicines that treat and prevent nausea, vomiting and dizziness caused by motion sickness. These medicines calm the inner ear and are effective when taken before travel.

One such motion sickness medicine is Novomin by XepaSP. Novomin has anti-emetic properties and can be used for the prevention and treatment of nausea and vomiting – common symptoms of motion sickness.

There you go then! Don't forget to send us a postcard! And bring back souvenirs! Lots of souvenirs! For us! Thanks! **LW**

(Footnotes)

- 1 Spira, A.M. 2003. "Preparing the Traveller", in *Lancet* Vol. 361: 1368-81.
- 2 Ericsson CD. "Traveler's diarrhea: epidemiology, prevention, and self treatment.", in *Infect Dis Clin North Am* 1998; 83: 285-303.

