

# Traveling without consulting a doctor can be risky

By Brooks Martin

Traveling is fun, exciting and enriching, but there are risks. While a simple trip to Placerville or Reno doesn't require a travel medicine consultation, something exotic could. And a three-day-business-trip to Mumbai with a stay in an air conditioned hotel has very different travel risks than a three-week- hiking-trip in northern India.

Travel risks are especially concentrated in less-developed countries. The poorer the place, the less likely it is to have basic sanitation and vector control, which is a method to limit or eradicate the mammals, birds and insects or other arthropods, which transmit disease pathogens.



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A wise choice is to consult your doctor before you travel. A travel medicine consultation should ideally be completed six to eight-weeks prior to your voyage. Here's what to bring to your physician visit:

Itinerary. This will help your physician decide on the specific medical risks that might be present.

Contacts. Information from your travel group or local contacts can be invaluable.

Medication list. Maintain a current list of the medications you are taking and the dosage.

Immunization records. Provide as much information as you have.

Your physician will address general immunizations (tetanus, etc.) in addition to vaccines for less common diseases, such as rabies. Federal and state laws restrict yellow fever vaccines to licensed clinics, such as Barton Family Medicine in South Lake Tahoe.

Be sure to consider recommendations and prescriptions for potential problems, such as traveler's diarrhea. You may not be able to protect against everything. You'll want to weigh the costs and risk of each vaccine. For example, rabies (the vaccine for which is very expensive) is present around the world, but the risks of contracting it are very different between a vacation to the beaches of Thailand and living there as a Peace Corps volunteer in a rural village. There's no vaccine for malaria, but depending on where you travel, it can be a big concern. Varying from simple mosquito bite precautions to medications and self-treatment options, the best prevention is education.

Knowledge is key before starting any adventure

Barton Family Medicine provides handouts concerning water, food, insects, sun, high altitude, and heat or cold risks. We can match the information to your itinerary. We also offer basic travel hints and information about travel insurance. Stay educated with up-to-date information by going online. The more you travel, the more you should know about travel health.

*Brooks Martin is an active member of the International Society of Travel Medicine and is soon to be certified as an official ISTM physician.*