Travel Health Blog

By Kim Miller, M.D.

Staff Physician, McGrath Health and Wellness Center

Travelling over winter or spring break? Perhaps you will be spending time in Guatemala, Jamaica or El Salvador on a service trip, or studying biodiversity in Costa Rica or innovative business models in China and South Korea. You’ve got your passport ready, your plane tickets booked, and you’re good to go. Or are you?

Have you seen a physician for a travel visit yet? Besides making sure you are up to date on your routine vaccinations, you may benefit from additional travel-related vaccines specific to your destination. These include hepatitis A, typhoid, and polio vaccines.

These vaccinations can help keep you healthy during your trip, but what if you get sick while you are away? According to the Center for Disease Control, 2012 Yellow Book, Traveler’s Health, “travelers’ diarrhea (TD) is the most predictable travel-related illness. Attack rates range from 30% to 70% of travelers, depending on the destination. Traditionally, it was thought that TD could be prevented by following simple recommendations such as “boil it, peel, it, or forget it,” but studies have found that people who follow these rules still get ill. Poor hygiene practice in local restaurants is likely the largest contributor to the risk for TD.”

The most common causes of traveler’s diarrhea are bacterial, with E. Coli heading the list. High risk areas include most of Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Mexico, and Central and South America. Intermediate risk countries include Eastern Europe, South Africa, and some of the Caribbean islands.

If your itinerary includes any of these areas, you may want to consider bringing prescription antibiotics with you for treatment if you become sick while travelling. You will also want to bring over-the-counter medicines like Imodium for symptomatic relief.

Your physician can also evaluate your risk for malaria based on your destination and prescribe medicine to prevent infection.

Taking a few steps at home before you travel can ensure a safe and healthy trip for you.

For more important information on staying healthy while travelling, check out www.cdc.gov or the 2012 Yellow Book at http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/page/yellowbook-2012-home.htm.