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Creating a State of Health

OSDH Encourages Planning Ahead to Stay Healthy During International Travel

As Oklahomans prepare for international travel for business, leisure, or volunteer activities, the Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) is encouraging travelers to do their research to make their trip a healthy one.

"It's important to be proactive by learning about travel advisories for your destination, planning ahead to obtain any recommended vaccines or preventive medications, or deciding if travel should be rescheduled for persons at high-risk of illness," State Epidemiologist Dr. Kristy Bradley said.

Examples of current travel advisories include an outbreak of listeriosis associated with processed meat products in South Africa; and an outbreak of yellow fever in multiple states of Brazil, where a vaccination to protect against yellow fever is recommended at least 10 days before travel.

Yellow fever is a mosquito-borne illness, and is just one of a number of illnesses that are a common threat while traveling internationally. Malaria is another prominent mosquito-transmitted disease that should be avoided. Malaria is present in large areas of Africa, Latin America, southeast Asia, and the South Pacific.

Travelers should do their research and obtain anti-malarial drugs from their healthcare provider if their travel destination is an area at high risk for malaria. Mosquitoes are common in countries or islands with warm climates. Travelers are urged to take mosquito precautions such as wearing appropriate clothing, using insect repellent with DEET or picaridin, and using bed nets if sleeping in open rooms, lodges or tents.

The OSDH recommends the following tips for staying healthy during international travel:

Preparation Tips Before Travel

- Be aware of the current health risks at the travel destination. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) travelers' health website (www.cdc.gov/travel) provides current information about common diseases, emerging health threats, recommended vaccinations, preventive medications, and food and water safety by country.
- Get all recommended travel vaccines. Since some vaccines require multiple shots and take time to become fully effective, visit a healthcare provider at least four to six weeks before travel.
- Talk with a healthcare provider about any needed travel medications such as preventative medicine for malaria or an antibiotic for traveler's diarrhea.
- Women who are pregnant or plan to become pregnant should talk to a healthcare provider about the risk of traveling and precautions.
- Prepare a travel kit which includes:
 - Enough prescription medications and any other medications your physician may recommend to last through the duration of the trip.
 - Sunscreen
 - Insect repellent, ideally containing DEET or picaridin.
 - Alcohol-based hand gels containing 60 - 95 percent alcohol.
- Prepare a list of contacts in the event an illness or injury occurs while traveling. Include the local health jurisdiction and local U.S. Embassy or Consulate in case you need assistance.

General Tips for Staying Healthy While Traveling

- Wash hands with hot, soapy water before touching food, after using the bathroom, after blowing your nose, sneezing or coughing, and after touching animals.
- Carry alcohol-based hand sanitizers to clean hands when they are not visibly dirty or when hand-washing facilities are not available.
- Use caution around all wild and domestic animals. If you are bitten, clean the wound with soap and water and consult a local healthcare provider for further evaluation. Follow up with a healthcare provider after returning home.
- Avoid drinking or using untreated water for brushing teeth, particularly in areas where hygiene and sanitation are poor. Use only bottled or boiled water in these regions.
- Select food with care, especially in areas where hygiene and sanitation are poor, or in areas with untreated water. Raw foods may be contaminated, so avoid fresh vegetable or fruit salads, uncooked vegetables, and unpasteurized milk and milk products such as cheese. Eat food that has been cooked and is still hot.
- If you become ill after returning home, inform the healthcare provider of the countries visited.

For more information about international travel safety, visit the CDC travelers' health website at www.cdc.gov/travel or the OSDH travelers' health web site at <https://go.usa.gov/xQxW7>.