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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding travel health among Muscat International Airport travelers in Oman: Identifying the gaps and addressing the challenges



Seif S. Al-Abri ^a, Doaa M. Abdel-Hady ^{b,c,*}, Idris S. Al-Abaidani ^b

^a Directorate general of disease surveillance and control, Ministry of health, Muscat, Oman

^b Department of Communicable Diseases, Ministry of health, Muscat, Oman

^c Faculty of Medicine, Mansoura University, Mansoura, Egypt

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Abstract Although the majority of travel-associated communicable diseases can be prevented, the public health burden of these diseases remains significant. Relatively little is known about how travelers know and perceive the health risks associated with travel and how they utilize preventive measures before and while traveling abroad. This study was conducted to determine the level of the knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) of Muscat International Airport travelers about travel health in order to assess the knowledge gap and the need for travel health services in Oman. A cross-sectional study was conducted over a period of 1 week using a self-administered questionnaire. The overall level of knowledge about vaccine-preventable diseases, food safety, and preventive measures against insect bites of the participants was inadequate. The practice concerning preventive travel health measures, such as the use of specific immunizations and antimalarial prophylaxis, was very limited, and influenced by some personal and travel-related factors. The inadequate level of travelers' knowledge and poor utilization of travel medicine ser-

* Corresponding author at: Department of Communicable Diseases, Ministry of health, P.O. Box 393, Muscat 100, Oman.

E-mail address: doaahady2000@gmail.com (D.M. Abdel-Hady).

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vices highlights the need for the provisions of specialized travel medicine services at the national level and to develop educational materials promoting the importance of pre-travel health advice.

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1. Introduction

International traveling for various purposes has increased significantly. It exposes individuals to new cultural, psychological, physiological, and microbiological experiences [1]. The risk of a traveler for contracting a travel-related infectious disease does not only depend on the destination of travel, length of the trip, and planned activities, but also on the traveler's personal risk profile [2]. Travelers' abilities to adapt, cope, and survive are influenced by many variables such as personality and experience, which differ according to age, gender, culture, social, education, and health [3].

One of the main determinants of the traveler's personal risk profile is usually presented as the knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) of a traveler toward the prevention of travel-related infectious disease. In KAP studies, knowledge is usually defined as an accurate risk perception, whereas attitude is commonly defined as either intended risk-seeking or risk-avoiding behavior. Finally, practice is defined as the rate of protection against a certain travel-related infectious disease [2].

Although most travel-associated diseases can be prevented through vaccination, medications, and pre-travel consultation, several surveys have demonstrated that a high proportion of travelers are unaware of travel health risks. In many cases, travelers have not received the immunizations, medications for prophylaxis, or standby treatment usually recommended in their respective countries of origin, despite the range of opportunities for travel health advice available [4–7]. Therefore, the public health burden of these diseases remains significant and travelers are still contracting diseases during international travel [8].

Moreover, returning from abroad with an infectious disease might affect relatives, people with close contacts, or the larger community. Applying prophylactic travel health measures benefits individuals and the public health as well.

This is the first study to be conducted in Oman considering KAP of the public about some travel health-related aspects. With the aim of determining the level of the KAP of Muscat International

Airport travelers about travel health, it may help in assessing the knowledge gap and the needs of travel health services in Oman.

2. Materials and methods

This is a cross-sectional study looking at travel health KAP of travelers. It was conducted in Muscat International Airport and included samples collected within 1 week from January 18, 2015 to January 25, 2015; the data were collected throughout the daytime to include as many as possible travelers to all destinations. Of the 250 travelers asked to participate, 219 participated (response rate of 87.6%); after exclusion of the questionnaires with missing data, the final number included in the study was 204.

A four page, self-administered, anonymous questionnaire was used for this study in order to measure the KAP regarding travel health. This questionnaire was developed and used in a previous study for the same purpose [8]. It consists of three main sections, including questions about some sociodemographic factors, travel preparedness, and travel health. The questionnaire takes less than 10 min to complete and it was prepared in Arabic and English to accommodate a participant's preference.

Questionnaires were administered by trained personnel from the port health staff to willing participants waiting to board an international flight at Muscat International Airport. Inclusion criteria for the participants was residence in Oman (Omanis or non-Omanis), aged ≥ 18 years, and that they were boarding an international flight.

A pilot study was conducted among 20 individuals in 1 day in order to check the time for filling, clarity of questions, and to train the investigators. Seventeen questions were used to assess an individual traveler's knowledge, and responses were ranked as excellent, good, or poor, as follows: $\geq 80\%$ excellent (≥ 14 correct answers), 60–80% as good (10–13 correct answers), and $<60\%$ as poor (<10 correct answers). Attitude toward travel health was classified as positive (those who are willing to adopt risk-avoiding behavior) or negative (those who are intending to adopt risk-seeking

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