



Vaccination and malaria prophylaxis among Greek international travelers to Asian destinations

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Summary

Background: International travel is rapidly increasing worldwide, and the greatest increases have occurred in tropical and subtropical areas. The aim of the survey was to investigate the pre-travel health-seeking practices of travelers to Asian destinations.

Methods: A questionnaire-based survey was conducted at the Athens International Airport between the 1st of November 2011 and the 30th of April 2013.

Results: A total of 1666 adult travelers participated in the study, and 69.7% were men. The mean age of the participants was 39 years. Previous travel to tropical countries was reported by 69% of the participants. The most frequent destination was the Indian subcontinent (45.0%). The main reasons for travel were visiting friends and relatives (VFRs; 36.5%) and business (32.4%). Most of the participants traveled for <1 month (51.4%). Only 24.5% pursued pre-travel consultations. Vaccinations were administered to 14.4% of the participants, and of those, 77%, 73%, and 32.5% received hepatitis A, tetanus/diphtheria, and typhoid vaccines, respectively. Malaria prophylaxis was given to 12.2% of the participants. Logistic regression analysis revealed that being male and unemployed, having an elementary level of education, traveling to visiting friends and relatives, and short durations of travel were significant determinants of not seeking pre-travel consultations.

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Conclusion: Significant gaps were revealed in the vaccinations and malaria prophylaxes of travelers departing to Asia. Specific educational tools should be developed to improve the awareness of travelers to high-risk destinations.

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Introduction

International travel is rapidly increasing worldwide, and the greatest increases have occurred in tropical and subtropical areas. During the last decade, international arrivals in the Asia-Pacific region have been well above the global average. International arrivals accounted for 21% of all arrivals in 2010, up from 16% in 2000 [1]. Travelers to developing countries can be exposed to various infectious agents and can facilitate their spread across borders. Two recent examples include the rapid worldwide spread of severe acute respiratory syndrome and influenza A (H1N1) [2,3].

Nearly 8% of travelers to the developing world require medical care during or after travel. The main diagnoses among ill returning travelers include systemic febrile illness with malaria, which is the most frequent cause, acute diarrhea, and dermatological disorders [4]. Among the 42,173 ill returning travelers observed between 2007 and 2011 at GeoSentinel clinics, 32.6% had traveled to Asian countries [5]. Vaccine-preventable diseases (VPDs) accounted for 1.5% of 37,542 ill returning travelers. Enteric fever, acute viral hepatitis and influenza were the most common diagnoses, and the factors associated with *Salmonella typhi* included travel to Asia [6].

Pre-travel consultation and the provision of general advice, vaccines and malaria prophylaxis can minimize the health risks of traveling. Previous studies have shown that travelers who seek pre-travel consultations have better risk perceptions regarding infections and exhibit higher levels of risk-reducing behavior [7–9]. Other studies have revealed that a large proportion of Western travelers do not receive health information [8–15]. Only 41.2% of Western that are ill following returning from Asian countries reported that they had a pre-travel visit [5]. Few other studies on the pre-travel health-seeking behavior of travelers to the Asia-Pacific region suggest that the proportion of Asian travelers who attend pre-travel consultations is even lower than that of Western travelers [14–17].

Studies about the knowledge, attitudes and practices of travelers to Asian destinations are lacking

in Greece. The purpose of the current study was to identify health-seeking practices and to determine the provision of vaccines and malaria prophylaxis among Greek travelers visiting Asia and departing from the Athens International Airport.

Methods

A questionnaire-based survey was conducted from the 1st of November 2011 to the 30th of April 2013. Data collection was performed 2 days each week. Travelers leaving from the departure gates of the Athens International Airport were invited to participate in the survey. The inclusion criteria were being a Greek resident, ≥ 19 years old, and traveling to Asia or the Middle East. Travelers going to Australia, New Zealand and Japan were excluded from the survey. Therefore, only three airlines were selected. A total of 1666 adult travelers were studied. We sought to study 1500–2000 participants at the beginning of the study, which corresponds to approximately 10% of the total number of travelers to Asian destinations according to Hellenic National Statistics Authority data (personal communication). We aimed for a large sample size was to cover a wide range of destinations in our study. The travelers participated on a voluntary basis, and oral informed consent was obtained. Approval was given by the International Airport Authority, the airlines flying to the above destinations, and the Board of Directors of the Hellenic Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

Data was collected using a standardized anonymous questionnaire that was specifically designed in the Greek language. This questionnaire was administered by 4 trained interviewers and required approximately 10 min. The data included information about demographics, travel characteristics, and pre-travel consultations (vaccination, malaria prophylaxis, general preventive measures, and the source of any pre-travel consultation). Approximately 10 randomly selected travelers were interviewed each per visit in the waiting area for the airport gates according to the inclusion criteria and the selected flights. The interviews

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