

Travel Medical Kit



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KEYWORDS

- Travel medical kit • Diarrhea • Altitude • Respiratory • Motion • First aid
- Women's health • Allergic reaction

KEY POINTS

- The traveler's medical kit is an essential tool for both the novice and expert traveler. Travelers' medical kits are designed to treat travel-related illness and injury and to ensure pre-existing medical conditions are managed appropriately.
- Travelers are at increased risk for common gastrointestinal issues during travel, such as infectious diarrhea, constipation, nausea, and/or gastroesophageal reflux disease.
- Respiratory illnesses, usually upper or lower respiratory tract infections, make up approximately 8% of the ailments present in returned international travelers.
- Approximately 12% of travelers experience a travel-related skin condition, such as contact dermatitis from plant toxins, bacterial skin infections, and/or fungal infections, like tinea pedis.
- First aid treatment for minor injuries is essential to all travel medical kits. The complexity ranges from a small, simple case for the urban traveler to a larger, extensive case for wilderness travel.

INTRODUCTION

The traveler's medical kit is an essential tool for both the novice and expert traveler. Its size and complexity depends on the length of travel, travel destination (urban vs remote), activities, and age and health of the traveler. Travelers' medical kits are designed to treat travel-related illness and injury and to ensure preexisting medical conditions are managed appropriately.^{1,2} For most travelers, the medical kit provides treatment for common health issues that are acquired abroad and provides peace of mind for the unexpected travel mishap.

Personal Health

All travelers are encouraged to carry documentation of their current health status. Personal health documentation should include the following:

- All allergies (medications, vaccines, foods, toxins)
- Current medications (prescribed and over the counter [OTC])

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- Immunization records
- Current diagnosis list
- Surgical history
- Contact information for health care provider and contact person(s) in case of emergency

Travelers with severe allergies and/or life-threatening health conditions are encouraged to wear a universal medical alert bracelet (www.medicalalert.com). Patients should also review their current health insurance plans and coverage related to international travel before departure. Travelers should consider purchasing a separate policy for medical evacuation coverage.

Prescriptions

All travelers should carry their prescription medications in their original containers in their carry-on luggage and are encouraged to carry an extra supply in a separate location. Travelers may consider carrying a printed and signed prescription for each medication. If additional medications are needed, travelers should be aware that medications obtained in Africa, Asia, and Latin America may be counterfeit drugs. Counterfeit drugs often lack the active drug ingredient, may be expired, and/or may contain harmful additives. Travelers should also be aware of country-specific limitations regarding entrance with medications, such as opiates, cold and cough medications (pseudoephedrine and diphenhydramine), stimulants commonly used for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and attention-deficit disorder, and some antidepressants. In some cases, a physician's letter outlining the reason for treatment may allow the use of such "prohibited" medications. Travelers should contact the embassy and/or consulate of their anticipated destination to ensure there are no restrictions.^{1,2}

Resources for counterfeit drugs:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): www.cdc.gov/Features/CounterfeitDrugs/index.html
- World Health Organization: <http://www.who.int/medicines/regulation/ssffc/en/>
- Customs and Border Protection

ALLERGIC REACTION

International travelers are at risk for allergic reactions with increased exposure to new insects, new foods, or hidden ingredients in foods due to less-strict labeling laws in the destination country. Examples of in-flight allergic reactions include peanut/tree nut allergies or perfume exposure. Cleaning seats, arm rests, food trays, and door handles with sanitizer wipes can reduce exposure to allergens in flight. As well, travelers may request a nonallergen meal or better yet bring their own food and avoid use of blankets and pillows to reduce in-flight allergen exposure.

Cigarette smoking is more common in countries outside the United States and pollution due to traffic and burning coal is more frequent. Thus, persons with reactive airway disease (RAD) may experience acute breathing problems and should plan accordingly. Persons with a known history of anaphylaxis should carry an epinephrine auto-injector with a minimum of 2 doses for the routine traveler and up to 6 doses for the traveler going to a remote area.³⁻⁵

The medical kit for allergy prevention and treatment may include the following:

- A short-acting antihistamine: diphenhydramine (Benadryl)
- A long-acting antihistamine: cetirizine (Zyrtec), loratadine (Claritin), fexofenadine (Allegra)

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