Helping you respond to common travel emergencies

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Before You Leave

Depending on the kind of trip you are taking and how strenuous it might be, consider getting a medical check-up from your physician. Work with your physician to develop a medical history form (available at www.emergencycareforyou.org) to include in your Traveler’s First Aid Kit, listing any medical problems, operations, allergies, as well as a copy of your most recent EKG. If you wear corrective lenses or glasses, take an extra pair on your trip, and carry your lens prescription with you.

Visit the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) web site at www.tsa.gov for instructions on traveling on airplanes with medications or special health care needs.

It’s a good idea to notify close friends and family members of your itinerary, and keep with you the names and phone numbers of emergency contacts back home so they can be contacted in case of a medical emergency.
Basic Kit Contents

Consider keeping a Traveler’s First Aid Kit in your car. The contents of the kit can be tailored for other kinds of trips, such as air travel. Depending on the kind of trip, you may want to reduce or vary the contents (e.g., bring sunscreen and sunburn ointment when you go to the beach, bring insect spray for a camping trip). For the kit itself, use a tote bag that can hold all the items you need and is easy to carry.

ACEP suggests the following items for a basic Traveler’s First Aid Kit.

• Any personal medications (over-the-counter or prescribed) or items recommended by your physicians (e.g., Epi-Pen for life-threatening allergic reactions).

• Acetaminophen, ibuprofen and aspirin tablets: To relieve headache, pain, fever and simple sprains or strains. Use liquid forms of acetaminophen and ibuprofen for infants, toddlers and young children who are not able to chew or swallow tablets. Have at least two aspirin tablets available at all times in case of heart attack (unless not recommended by your physician). Use appropriate dosages, and make sure the medicine is age appropriate. Due to the risk of Reye’s syndrome, aspirin (even baby/children’s aspirin) should not be used to relieve flu symptoms or be given to anyone under age 19.

• Antibiotic ointment: To prevent infection in burns, cuts and scrapes.

• Antifungal cream: To soothe itching caused by fungus.

• Antacid tablets or liquid: For indigestion.

• Antihistamine (or Epi-Pen as prescribed by a doctor): To relieve allergies and inflammation. Use appropriate dosages, and make sure the medicine is age appropriate.
Traveler’s First Aid Kit

- **Hydrocortisone cream**: To relieve irritation from rashes.
- **Throat lozenges**: For sore throats.
- **Sunscreen**: SPF 15 or higher, broad-spectrum.
- **Bandages of assorted sizes**: To cover minor cuts and scrapes.
- **Thermometer (with case)**: To take temperatures. For babies under age 1, use a rectal thermometer and include petroleum jelly (to lubricate the rectal thermometer).
- **Sharp scissors with rounded rips**: To cut tape, gauze or clothes.
- **Tweezers**: To remove small splinters, foreign objects, bee stingers and ticks from the skin (see first aid manual for proper removal of ticks).
- **Antiseptic wipes**: To disinfect wounds or clean hands, tweezers, scissors and thermometer.
- **Hand-purifier gel**: To use where there is no access to soap and water. For effective sanitizing, be sure the alcohol level is greater than 60% and ideally, 90%. Use for disinfecting purposes only, not for the removal of dirt or other substance from hands.
- **Handwipes**: For quick removal of dirt or other substances. Babywipes are an excellent option.
- **Cold pack**: To reduce swelling from an injury.
- **Medical history form**, which includes a list of all over-the-counter and prescription medications you and your family members are taking. Include copies of prescriptions and the names and phone numbers of your physicians back home.
  - **Enough medications** (for your full trip plus at least two to three extra days).
  - **First aid information or manual**.

For more health and safety tips, visit www.emergencycareforyou.org.
For Hiking and Outdoor Travel

The more remote you go, the more prepared you should be for a medical emergency. Your kit should be designed for the type of trip you are taking and the number of people going. Include everything mentioned above, plus consider the following items. Also consider storing the kit in a waterproof container.

- Alcohol swabs: To disinfect wounds or tools.
- Antidiarrheal medicine.
- Cough medicine.
- Sterile eyewash (e.g., saline solution).
- Motion sickness medication.
- Insect repellent: Use as directed. Repellents appropriate for use on children should contain no more than 10 percent DEET and 20-30 percent DEET for adults, because the chemical, which is absorbed through the skin, can cause harm.
- Calamine Lotion: To relieve itching and irritation from insect bites and stings and poison ivy.
- Ace bandages (assorted sizes): to provide support for strains and sprains.
- Triangular bandage: To wrap injuries and make an arm sling.
- Adhesive tape: To keep gauze in place.
- Bandage closures (one-fourth and one-inch sizes): To tape cut edges of bandages together.
- Elastic wraps: To wrap wrist, ankle, knee and elbow injuries.
- Gauze in rolls and two-inch and four-inch pads: To dress larger cuts and scrapes.
- Cigarette lighter: To sterilize instruments and to start a fire if needed (to keep warm or to make smoke to signal for help).
• Moleskin for blisters.
• Safety pins: To fasten splints and bandages.
• Disposable, instant-activating cold packs: For cooling injuries and burns.
• Latex-free gloves: To protect hands and reduce risk of infection when treating open wounds.
• Change for pay phone and chargers for cell phone.
• Pocket mask for CPR.
• Small flashlight, compass and matches in waterproof container.
• Small knife (e.g., Swiss army-type).
• Mirror, small, unbreakable (for signaling).
• Whistle (for signaling).

In addition, every car should have a road-side assistance kit, which includes such items as jumper cables, road flares, blankets, flashlight, batteries and enough extra water and non-perishable food for at least a day. Consider the specific needs of very young children and pets as well. Most of the items can be purchased together in a pre-fabricated first aid kit sold in most drug stores and grocery stores. It is also a good idea to carry a small fire extinguisher for camping trips.

Hints for Travel by Cruise Ship

If you are traveling on board a cruise ship, ask what medical staff and equipment are available in case of an emergency. The American College of Emergency Physicians promotes standards and has created guidelines for emergency care on cruise ships, although many are registered under foreign countries, and the standards are not enforceable. The cruise ship industry has taken many steps to promote higher standards of health care, especially following numerous news stories of thousands of cruise-ship passengers becoming ill from viruses. Before you take a cruise, ask:

• Is there an emergency physician on board to oversee care?
• What kinds of resources and medical facilities are available for emergency care? Is the ship equipped to deal with serious illnesses, such as heart attack or stroke?

If you have any chronic medical conditions (e.g., COPD), inform the cruise line four to six weeks before you leave. The cruise line will need a letter from your doctor, a brief medical history and your current oxygen prescription. You’ll need to make prior arrangements to have your oxygen units delivered directly to the cruise ship before you depart.

Special cruises are now available for travelers who have certain medical conditions, such as people who need dialysis.

Hints for Foreign Travel

Before any foreign travel, always check with your physician, travel medicine clinic or public health department about any immunizations and medical documentation you will need, specific to the area you are traveling. Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website for up-to-date information and any travel warnings. www.cdc.gov/travel

Consider getting traveler’s health insurance to cover costs of canceling your trip and returning home early in the event of an emergency. Learn about the limitations of your health insurance plan. Most do not cover medical problems in other countries, and if you have a medical problem, the foreign country may require you to pay all the medical bills up front before you can leave. Traveler’s gap coverage is inexpensive, and it will cover whatever medical costs your health insurance plan does not cover.

Travelers to foreign countries also should check the CDC traveler’s web site for health information about the country. Pay particular attention to warnings about local food and water safety.
Avoid Traveler's Diarrhea:

Stomach ailments such as diarrhea and vomiting can be common when traveling on cruise ships or in foreign countries. Use caution if sanitary conditions seem questionable and practice the following tips to help prevent becoming sick.

**DOs:**
- Wash hands frequently and always before eating.
- Eat items that require little handling in preparation.
- Eat only well-cooked and hot foods.
- Eat only fresh fruits and vegetables you have peeled or seen prepared, so you know they were not contaminated in the preparation process.
- For countries with unsanitary water, drink hot beverages, such as coffee or tea, and make sure they were not prepared with local tap water.
- Drink bottled water or name-brand carbonated beverages.
- Wipe off any bottle before drinking or pouring.
- Tie a colored ribbon around the bathroom faucet in your room as a reminder not to drink the tap water.

**DON’Ts:**
- Never drink tap water. Don’t brush your teeth with tap water.
- Never drink fresh water from a lake or standing water.
- Avoid bottled water not opened in front of you.
- Avoid ice cubes. If you must have a cool drink, place ice cubes in a small, clean, leak-proof bag and place the bag in your drink. Carry bags with you.
- Avoid food from street vendors.
- Avoid raw shellfish, any uncooked seafood or raw meat.
- Avoid uncooked vegetables and salads.
- Avoid dairy products.
- Avoid juices not prepared in front of you. Tap water may have been added.
- Minimize swimming and swallowing water unless well-chlorinated.