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*Shot records and passports*  
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## Safe Travel, Happy Trails

By Penny Martin

**INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL** can be exciting unless your trip takes a horrible turn due to illness. The days of throwing a bag together and jumping on a plane are over. Traveling abroad today requires more than just a passport. Being prepared and thinking in terms of preventative health care could make your international travel less stressful and more healthful.

North Texas Infectious Disease Consultants (NTIDC) is a physician group that established the North Texas Travel Medicine Center (NTTMC) in Plano dedicated to providing exemplary health care that encompasses the total

needs of the traveling patient.

"NTIDC has always provided travel vaccinations as part of the treatment of our patients," says Dr. Louis Sloan, owner of North Texas Travel Medicine Center. "When we expanded locations to include the Park Cities and Plano in 2005, we formed NTTMC. The additional locations were needed for the ease of patients."

Regardless of the travel destination, the most common travel related health problems are persistent gastrointestinal illness, respiratory infections and fever. Most travelers infected abroad become

ill within twelve weeks after returning home. However, some diseases, such as malaria, may not cause symptoms until six to twelve months after exposure.

North Texas Travel Medicine Center offers vaccinations for most of the identified diseases across the globe and by doing so is one of the most comprehensive service providers of its kind in the area. They also provide additional information to prepare travelers such as special vaccines for diseases prevalent in their destination country that may be unknown to the traveler. Dr. Sloan points out that NTTMC provides all vaccinations for travelers. "Many physicians offer routine vaccinations, such as hepatitis A or tetanus, but to be able to provide vaccines to specific parts of the world, an office must be approved by the Centers for Disease Control. We are an approved foreign vaccination site offering vaccinations for yellow fever, encephalitis, rabies, hepatitis A and B, influenza and many more."

Gwen Harker Poole, from Frisco, found North Texas Travel Medicine Center invaluable when her daughter, Ruby, planned on traveling to Ecuador with her church mission group. After asking several friends about where to go for the vaccinations Ruby would need, Ms. Harker Poole was referred to NTTMC. "I was pleased with the service we received," she said. "I expected to get the vaccinations, but at the center I got more than expected. Along with inoculations for yellow fever and typhoid, we were educated on many of the geographic areas where Ruby would be working. She was given information on how to communicate with the people if she needed help and she even learned how to treat her clothes to repel mosquitoes. She walked away with everything she might need, making it easier for us to let her go on the trip."

Survival kits are provided to patients at their appointments. These unique kits are designed to hold important travel documents such as passports and



patient's past and current medical condition. Some patients are not able to receive specific vaccinations due to their medical history. For instance, transplant recipients are prohibited from some due to the interaction with their anti-rejection medication. An office consultation also includes safe travel tips, prescriptions required to treat diseases specific to the region and even a list of risks associated with contracting specific diseases by region.

The center offers different levels of service, from individual in-clinic patient education and vaccination appointments to large off-site corporate travel packages. For small groups of ten or fewer travelers, the center provides group travel safety information and vaccine assessment as well as private individualized health screenings and vaccinations with post injection monitoring. For large groups, the center offers travel safety lectures and vaccine assessment in company meeting rooms, church halls and community facilities. Many physicians refer their patients to the center because they are approved by the Center of Disease Control. "Many employers, mission organizers and travel agents send us their employees and clients," states Dr. Sloan.

The center treats a steady stream of patients year round, but early spring tends to be their busiest time as travelers get ready for their summer travel. This is also peak travel time for mission groups. After the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina, the center treated many patients who were heading out to help those impacted by these natural disasters. Another case involved a group of veterinarians who were doing mission work and came in for their prophylactic rabies shots. This can be a difficult treatment to coordinate because it involves a series of shots.

"A particularly fun group is one of adoptive parents coming in for vaccinations prior to their departure

vaccination cards, which are required upon entering many countries. The kit also includes prescriptions to help self-treat ailments such as nausea and constipation, along with other useful items like sunscreen, hand wipes and important names and phone numbers of medical professionals that can be of service if needed.

Travelers have little choice in where they can get non-routine vaccinations. NTTMC is an easier, more

comprehensive medical option to the county health department. In addition to the necessary vaccines, they offer physician consultation regarding the health risks and environmental concerns associated with each country around the world. The cost for these services varies based on which vaccinations are needed. NTTMC is competitive with the health department, but does charge for the physician consultation.

Office visits include a review of a

## International Travel Tips

1. Schedule an office visit four to six weeks before international travel. Most vaccines take time to become effective and some must be given in a series over a period of days or sometimes weeks.
2. Put together a Health Kit. Pack prescribed medications along with over-the-counter products. Some examples would be aspirin, sunscreen, insect repellent and antibiotic ointment for scratches or bites.
3. There is an immunization schedule of recommended vaccines to protect adults from common diseases for which they are at risk. Ask your doctor about this schedule and keep vaccinations up-to-date.
4. There is a difference between required and recommended vaccinations. "Required" means a country's government asks all travelers to present formal proof of vaccination, while "recommended" vaccinations are suggested to protect travelers from illnesses and to prevent the importation of infectious diseases across international borders.
5. The most important way to reduce infectious disease transmission during travel is to wash hands carefully and frequently. If soap and water are not available, use a waterless, alcohol-based hand gel containing at least 60 percent alcohol.
6. Avoid consuming foods and beverages purchased from street vendors or other establishments where unhygienic conditions are present. Other foods to avoid are raw or undercooked meats and seafood and raw fruits and vegetables unless they can be peeled (i.e., oranges, bananas, avocados).

enroute to getting their new baby." Dr. Sloan adds, "They usually come in groups as the adoption agencies schedule the trips for parents to finalize the adoption." The center sees a wide variety of patients. "Families come in for inoculations for around-the-world voyages. They bring the entire family, young children to grandma and grandpa, for vaccinations and preventative treatments," says Dr. Sloan. "Sometimes it makes it easier for the children to get their shots if Grandpa goes first."

The goal of NTTMC is to provide travelers with important vaccinations, but also in-depth travel education and health-related information to help make traveling in other countries healthy and disease-free. Travelers who benefit from the center's health program include business and pleasure travelers, organizations and corporations, mission trip participants and students studying abroad.

The travel health program includes:

- Vaccinations for identified diseases worldwide.
- Health-risk reduction tips.
- Environmental concerns related to insect and waterborne illnesses.
- Recognizing symptoms and avoiding diseases.
- Information regarding safe food and water.
- Emergency contact numbers, including the American embassies and consulates.
- 24-hour medical support while traveling abroad.

North Texas Infectious Disease Consultants and North Texas Travel Medicine Center doctors are supported by a specially trained staff of physician assistants, registered nurses, licensed vocation nurses, pharmacists and technicians. Physicians at the centers are board-certified in both internal medicine and the subspecialty of infectious diseases. "We are actively involved in many facets of continuing education both organizing and participating in medical and infectious disease conferences and fellowships on a routine basis," says Dr. Sloan. "This affords us access to a large network of other dedicated and highly trained

specialists. Providing travel vaccinations is an extension of the type of medicine provided by infectious diseases doctors. "All physicians associated with North Texas Infectious Disease Consultants are also trained in the treatment and management of tropical and infectious diseases throughout the world," Dr. Sloan explains. "All of our physicians are members of International Society of Travel Medicine, or ISTM, whose mission is to promote healthy and safe travel abroad."

Families come in for inoculations for around-the-world voyages. They bring the entire family for vaccinations and preventative treatments.

The North Texas Infectious Disease Consultants and North Texas Travel Medicine Center have a very helpful website with an interactive map allowing you to choose a travel-related illness, for example, yellow fever, and the map will instantly show which countries have had cases of that disease. It also shows risk levels of contracting the disease and seasonal breakdowns which can help with travel planning. Their site address is [www.infectiousdiseases.com](http://www.infectiousdiseases.com).

The site also allows visitors to download important forms such as patient history, financial assistance and insurance. There are informative links to help in just about every area of travel planning, such as a listing of travel clinics everywhere in the world, information on passport services and travel warnings, instructions for bringing back items purchased abroad and clearing goods through customs, travel services that include 24-hour access to coordinators who help locate medical care providers, coordinate direct payment of covered medical expenses and assist in other medical, legal or travel situations.

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