

TRAVELER'S DIARRHEA

This is caused by E coli and other bacteria found in contaminated food and water. If the local water is not safe, you should take precautions. Foods that are cooked or boiled and served hot are safe. Raw foods, such as fruits and vegetables may be contaminated. Thick-peeled fruits such as bananas are considered safe, but thin-peeled fruits such as pears or apples are not. The general rule is; “COOK IT, BOIL IT, PEEL IT, OR THROW IT AWAY” Your travel-health care provider will provide you with two prescriptions in case you get travelers diarrhea. One is an antibiotic, usually Ciprofloxacin, to be used if the diarrhea is interfering with your activities and the other is an anti-diarrheal medication, Lomotil, used to slow down diarrhea. If you have loose stool, which is not interfering with your activities, you do not need to start the antibiotics immediately. Use the Lomotil to control the diarrhea. You should use the antibiotics when you have moderate to severe symptoms such as abdominal pain, severe abdominal cramping, bloody diarrhea, or fever.

FOOD PRECAUTIONS

Travelers should:

- Eat at establishments that are known to cater to foreigners or that are specifically known by other foreigners to be safe.
- Eat foods that are well-cooked and served steaming hot.
- Eat breads, tortillas, crackers, biscuits, and other baked goods.
- Eat fruits, nuts, and vegetables with thick skins, peels, or shells that you remove yourself.
- Eat canned foods.
- Always wash your hands with soap before eating and after using the toilet.

Travelers should NOT do the following;

- Do not eat any food from street vendors or market stalls.
- Do not eat leafy or uncooked vegetables and salads. Some organisms in soil and water are not destroyed by normal cleaning methods.
- Do not eat undercooked, raw, or cold meat, seafood, and fish.
- Do not eat large carnivorous fish, especially from reef areas. Many contain concentrated toxins.
- Do not eat or drink unpasteurized dairy products such as cheese, yogurt, and milk. Be particularly wary of ice cream and other frozen confections that may have been made or stored in contaminated containers.
- Do not eat cold sauces such as mayonnaise, salad dressing, chutneys, or salsas, which are usually raw and made by hand.
- Do not eat buffet foods such as lasagna, casseroles, and quiches-unless you know they are fresh (not reheated) and have been kept steaming hot. Avoid buffets where there are no food covers or fly controls.
- Do not eat creamy desserts, custards, or sauces that may not have been adequately refrigerated.

BEVERAGE PRECAUTIONS

Travelers should:

- Use sealed bottled water or chemically treated, filtered, or boiled water for drinking and for brushing teeth.
- Drink beverages made only with boiled water whenever possible (such as hot tea and coffee). Water boiled for any length of time (even 1 minute), at any altitude, is safe to drink.
- Drink canned, boxed, or commercially bottled carbonated water and drinks. International brands are safest. Beware of unsealed containers that may have been re-filled.
- Safely drink beer and wine; however, alcohol added to beverages does not render them safe.

- Purify your own water, if one of these options is not available. Decide which method to use for water purification and bring along the appropriate equipment.
- Carry safe water with you if you are going out for the day and where availability of safe water is not assured.
- Breast-feeding is the safest food source for infants who are still nursing. If formula is used, it must be prepared with boiled water and sterilized containers.

Travelers should NOT do the following:

- Do not drink tap water.
- Do not rinse toothbrush in tap water.
- Do not use ice unless it is made from boiled, bottled, or purified water. Freezing does not kill the organisms that cause diarrhea.
- Do not assume that water is safe because it is chlorinated. Chlorination does not destroy all the organisms that can make you ill.
- Do not drink from wet cans or bottles-the water on them may be contaminated. Dry wet cans/bottles before opening and clean all surfaces that will have contact with the mouth.
- Do not drink fruit juice unless it comes directly from a sealed container; otherwise it may have been diluted with tap water.

TREATING WATER

Chemical disinfection

If it is not possible to boil water, chemical disinfection is an alternative. Most (but not all) diarrhea pathogens are susceptible to being killed by iodine, which can be used to disinfect water, leafy vegetables, and fruits. Add 5 drops of 2% iodine to 1 liter of water and let stand for 30 minutes.

- Travelers who have thyroid problems or iodine allergies or who are pregnant should NOT use iodine for water purification.
- For those travelers who wish to avoid the taste and smell of iodine in their disinfected water, vitamin C (ascorbic acid) can be added to the water after the iodine has been in contact with the water for 30 minutes or more. Add about 50 mg of vitamin C to a liter of water and shake briefly to eliminate the iodine taste and odor.
- Tetraglycine hydroperiodide tablets (e.g., Globaline, Potable-Aqua, Coghlan's) are available from pharmacies and sporting goods stores. The manufacturer's instructions should be followed

Chlorine also can be used, but its germicidal activity varies greatly with temperature and other factors; thus it is less reliable than iodine.

Portable filters

It cannot be assumed that portable filters will make drinking water safe; most authorities make no recommendation regarding their use because of insufficient independent verification. However, in areas where it is not practical to boil all drinking water, a good quality filter with a pore size of 0.2 microns will eliminate the risk of pathogens. The filtered water should then be treated chemically as well.

Boiling

Urban travelers may choose an immersion coil for boiling water (a plug adapter and current converter might be necessary).