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# What are some common travel illnesses?

**Q** My family is about to embark on a year-end holiday. What are some common travel illnesses we should look out for?

**A** Some common travel illnesses to look out for include influenza, or the flu, and gastroenteritis. These illnesses can occur when travelling to colder climates as viruses multiply more easily and survive longer in cold environments. They can also occur when there is a seasonal flu outbreak or food or surface contamination.

Some people with the flu may run a high fever. Other common symptoms include a cough, runny nose and sore throat. Children, the elderly and pregnant women are at a higher risk for complications like pneumonia.

Gastroenteritis is quite common among travellers too. It can cause vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain and fever. Gastroenteritis may spread from one person to another or when someone touches contaminated food or surfaces. It is important to consult a doctor, especially if you have symptoms of severe gastroenteritis, such as persistent vomiting or severe diarrhoea, which can cause dehydration.

## What precautions should we take to avoid getting sick?

Make sure that you are fit to travel before any trip. If you feel unwell, consult a doctor who can assess your condition and advise whether you should postpone the trip. You may also consider getting influenza vaccines. The flu vaccination usually takes effect in about two weeks, thus it's better to plan for it a few weeks before your trip.



It is important to take precautions against common travel illnesses so that your family stays healthy on your trip. PHOTO: ISTOCK

## What are some other travel tips to help prevent illnesses?

### ● Practise food and water safety and hygiene

Avoid food that is raw or undercooked and be careful about eating food bought from street vendors. Drink water from clean sources. Do also wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after using the toilet and before meals.

### ● Bring a first-aid kit and medications for common illnesses

Some suggested items to bring along on your trip include plasters, bandages, gauze, cleaning solution, topical antibiotic ointment, a thermometer and medications for pain, fever, flu, vomiting, diarrhoea and motion sickness.

### ● Seek emergency care if symptoms are severe

Do not wait until you return to Singapore to seek medical attention as your condition may deteriorate.

### ● Check travel advisories

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention puts up travel notices about disease outbreaks on its website ([wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices](http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices)). Travellers should stay informed and avoid these areas where possible. Pre-travel vaccination may be advised in certain cases.

In the last few years, there have been measles outbreaks. Avoid travelling to affected regions with infants who have not been immunised.

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