

Tips to Stay Healthy While Traveling

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Holiday travel can be one of the greatest joys in life. Whether it's reconnecting with family and friends or just breaking up daily routines in new places, travel is good for the soul. But it is not always so good for our bodies.

Traveling has become even more stressful in recent years with the additional risk of COVID-19, record-breaking numbers of travelers combining with increasingly erratic weather to create long lines, flight delays, and cancellations.

Even when everything goes according to plan, changing your routine and being exposed to new germs can make you more vulnerable to infections. But with some preparation and smart choices, you can improve your chances of staying healthy while traveling.

Holiday travel is busier than ever

Over Memorial Day in 2024, TSA screened the highest number of passengers ever, only to break the record again over 4th of July weekend.

In addition, more than 17 million people traveled over Labor Day weekend – nearly 10% more than last year – and AAA predicts 115.2 million Americans will travel 50 miles or more from home in the last 10 days of December 2024.

This means a lot more people on the roads, in the sky, on the railways and on the water. And all of those people will, unfortunately, be spreading germs along with their holiday cheer.

Common travel illnesses

It's well known that travel contributes to the spread of illness, but it's only since COVID-19 that we've started taking that risk seriously. While the COVID-19 emergency is over, that doesn't mean the risk of infection is gone.

If you're traveling internationally, check the State Department's travel advisories for the country you will visit. And even if you're only traveling domestically, follow COVID-prevention best practices. Doing so can not only reduce your risk of infection from COVID-19, but from other viruses and illnesses as well.

Common travel illnesses include minor colds, the flu, and foodborne illness, all of which can ruin your trip. Other illnesses that PNW residents could only catch through traveling – like dengue fever or Zika virus – are much less common but more dangerous. Whether you get sick and how severely is influenced by exposure, sanitation, and the state of your own immune system.

By choosing to travel, your risk of exposure is automatically elevated. But you can do a little research about your destination to learn about potential risks and take appropriate precautions, such as getting additional vaccinations or protecting against mosquito bites.

Healthy travel tips

No matter where you travel, you can take action to boost your immunity and decrease your chances of getting sick. Use these tried-and-true tips for staying healthy away from home:

Stay up to date on your vaccinations.

Vaccines significantly reduce both the risk of serious illness from infection, and the risk of becoming infected in the first place.

Nearly everyone older than 6 months old should get a flu shot every year. People who are older than 65 or immune-compromised should talk with their care provider, as more frequent vaccinations may be recommended.

Wash your hands.

Although COVID-19 is primarily airborne, it is not exclusively so. Handwashing is still important to reduce the spread of COVID, other viruses, and harmful bacteria.

Wash your hands often – before eating and after shaking hands or touching doors and other potentially germ-infested surfaces. Wash your hands properly, and when handwashing is not convenient, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Wear a mask.

No one enjoys it, but wearing a mask does help lower the risk of respiratory virus transmission. Even if you don't choose to mask up all the time, wearing a mask in crowded, enclosed areas like buses, airplanes, or customs and immigration lines can reduce your chances of infection.

Drink a lot of water.

It's easy to become dehydrated when flying or on long road trips. Staying hydrated helps your immune system, and all of your other systems, to function properly.

Get enough sleep.

Sleep deprivation keeps your body from getting the re-charge it needs to function properly. Especially when you're changing time zones and disrupting your normal routine, rest is crucial. Take naps when you can't get a full night's sleep.

Manage stress.

Stress weakens your body's immune system. Stay calm and focus on solutions when problems arise, instead of fixating on the issue and spreading negativity along with infections. When you feel your calm starting to slip, focus on taking deep breaths.

Don't neglect nutrition.

It's tempting to indulge, especially when your schedule is disrupted and you're surrounded by holiday treats. But don't forget to incorporate some fruits and vegetables into your meals and get enough protein, especially when you travel.

Stay active.

Exercise is a natural immunity builder. Wherever you're going, make some time to move your body. Avoid being sedentary for long periods of time. On long flights, make sure to stretch your legs and walk around the plane every few hours to avoid getting blood clots in your legs.

Be prepared with a health kit.

Bring extra doses of all your prescription medications in case your trip is prolonged by bad roads, flight cancellations, or lost luggage. Packing ibuprofen, aspirin, vitamins, and medicine for motion sickness is also a good idea.

Protect yourself before you travel

If you're prone to illness when you travel, or are concerned about being exposed to other people's illnesses, you may want to take additional steps to protect yourself. Get expert advice from the primary care team at Western Washington Medical Group.

Request an appointment for yourself and your family members today to ensure you have a happy and healthy journey the next time you travel.

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