



TRAVELLER'S DIARRHEA

Traveller's diarrhea (TD) is the most frequent cause of illness among travellers. It can be caused by a change in diet, climate, or habits but more often is caused by consuming food or water that is contaminated with bacteria, viruses, or parasites.

Risk of traveller's diarrhea

This depends on the destination, accommodation, and length of stay.

- **Low Risk** (approximately 4 percent) – North America, northern/central Europe, Australia, New Zealand.
- **Intermediate Risk** (8-20 percent) – Caribbean, southern Europe, Israel, Japan, South Africa
- **High Risk** (up to 60 percent in first two weeks) – Mexico, Dominican Republic, Haiti and the developing countries of Africa, South and Central America, the Middle East, and Asia.

Prevention of diarrhea

1. Wash your hands!

Washing with soap and water after toileting and before preparing meals provides the best defence against diarrhea and many other diseases. Teach children to wash hands frequently and thoroughly with soap (15 to 20 seconds) or use alcohol-based hand cleanser.

2. Safe food and water:

Make sure food is fresh, well washed and thoroughly cooked. Water should be bottled or purified.

3. Dukoral vaccine:

Dukoral is a vaccine to help prevent TD caused by E. Coli or Cholera. Dukoral is most often taken by travellers to prevent diarrhea caused by E. Coli, a common type of infection among travellers to under-developed countries. Dukoral is a raspberry-flavoured drink that offers partial protection.

4. Bismuth subsalicylate (Pepto-Bismol):

This medicine provides about 65 percent protection against TD for adults and older children if taken as directed. Pepto-Bismol should not be taken if you:

- are allergic to or intolerant of aspirin,
- are on anticoagulant therapy or have a bleeding disorder,
- have a history of peptic ulcer or gastro-intestinal bleeding, or
- are taking antibiotics including doxycycline for malaria.

5. Antibiotics: don't take if bloody diarrhea

Your doctor may order antibiotics to prevent diarrhea if you:

- suffer from cancer, AIDS, colitis, kidney failure, or poorly controlled diabetes,
- take stomach-acid reducing drugs like Zantac or Losec, or
- cannot interrupt your trip if illness occurs.

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Severity of diarrhea

Diarrhea is often more of a nuisance than a medical problem but should be monitored carefully.

Mild diarrhea: loose stool with no other symptoms can be managed by drinking plenty of fluids, eating bland food, and taking Pepto-Bismol as directed. Imodium can be taken if immediate travel is essential but should not be used for more than 48 hours.

Moderate diarrhea: loose stool with cramps or nausea can be managed with the same treatment as mild diarrhea but with the addition of an antibiotic.

Severe diarrhea: intense cramps, nausea, bloody stools, dehydration, fever, and chills. Any of these symptoms require immediate medical attention.

General treatment of diarrhea

1. **Wash your hands!** Prevent the spread of infection by making sure that infected persons continue to frequently wash their hands.
2. **Fluid intake:** Sip plenty of slightly salty fluids to avoid dehydration. Drink sufficient liquids to keep urine pale in colour. Drink an oral rehydration solution or add salt and sugar to water if there is a risk of severe dehydration. The risk is highest in small children and the elderly.
3. **Bismuth subsalicylate (Pepto-Bismol):**
Pepto-Bismol is an effective treatment for mild diarrhea. Read the package directions carefully for the correct treatment dose. If you have existing medical conditions, make sure this medication is not contraindicated. Take at first sign of diarrhea.
4. **Loperamide (Imodium):** This is an antimotility drug that slows or stops bowel function. It will effectively reduce diarrhea but should be taken with caution. Read package inserts carefully.
5. **Antibiotics:** don't take if bloody diarrhea
Your doctor may prescribe antibiotics to take with you to if you are going to be in a country where antibiotics are scarce or unreliable. These antibiotics are intended to treat bacterial diarrhea that is unresponsive or is getting worse. The antibiotics are the choice of your family doctor who is more aware of your medical status. The antibiotics most frequently prescribed are:
 - Ciprofloxin 500 mg 2 x daily for 3 to 5 days – not under age of 18 years
 - Levofloxin 500 mg once or 500 mg daily for 1 to 3 days
 - Azithromycin 1000 mg once or 500 mg daily for 3 days (the only one effective in Thailand and Nepal)
6. **Antiparasitic medication:** Sometimes diarrhea is caused by a parasite and not a bacterium. You should seek medical attention for special medications to treat parasitic infections.

***Note:** all recommendations for medications refer to adults. Consult your family doctor for the appropriate prevention and treatment of traveller's diarrhea in children. It can be a severe and fatal illness in children more quickly than in adults.

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