



June 2010

Common Travel Health Myths

Myth: Drinking Gin & Tonic will prevent malaria

Fact: There is no scientific evidence to suggest this whatsoever.

Myth: I never get bitten by mosquitoes so I don't need to protect myself from diseases such as dengue fever or malaria

Fact: Everyone's body reacts differently to mosquito bites so you may have been bitten without knowing it. Always use an insect repellent with at least 50% DEET¹ and, within the limits of practicality, cover up with long sleeved, loose fitting clothing to help prevent bites.

Myth: I'm staying in a luxury resort so it's very unlikely I'll become ill.

Fact: You don't need to be off the beaten track to be exposed to health risks. Something as simple as slipping at the side of the pool, or sipping a cocktail could ruin your holiday by putting you at risk of an infectious disease². Avoid ice cubes in drinks unless you know that the water supply is safe. If you have an accident or experience an illness abroad and find yourself in a hospital or clinic, it is important to realise that medical and hygiene standards may differ to those in the UK¹⁰ – for example, in some parts of the world hospitals may re-use needles.

Myth: Friendly dogs won't carry rabies³.

Fact: An infected dog can have any number of mood changes due to the rabies virus. In a year the rabies virus is responsible for 50,000 deaths worldwide. In the

This information has been provided by the *8 Weeks To Go* campaign, a national campaign developed and funded by GlaxoSmithKline Travel Health, in association with Fit For Travel® (www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk), the Royal College of Nursing and a partner of the Foreign & Commonwealth Office's *Know Before You Go* travel advice campaign. The *8 Weeks To Go* campaign aims to educate British travellers about the importance of seeking expert health advice before overseas travel.



majority of cases rabies is fatal⁴. Travellers should get vaccinated before travel, avoid animals and get urgent help if bitten⁵.

Myth: Taking aspirin before flying will prevent Deep Vein Thrombosis

Fact: There is no evidence that supports taking aspirin to reduce your risk of developing DVT⁶. To reduce the risk travellers can take simple precautions such as keeping well hydrated, wearing compression stockings, avoiding alcohol consumption and keeping mobile whilst in transit.

Myth: Only dogs carry rabies

Fact: Wrong! Although dog bites cause the majority of infections, any mammal such as cats and bats, can carry rabies⁷.

Myth: I'm going travelling in the dry season so I won't be bothered by mosquito bites

Fact: Many countries do have wet and dry seasons, and in the wet season mosquito activity is increased⁸. However mosquitoes may still be active in the dry season.

Myth: People that have lived overseas are naturally immune to some diseases.

Fact: Many travellers returning home believe that because they used to live in that country they are immune to diseases found in that area. It's important to know that partial immunity for malaria fades just 6-12 months after leaving your country of origin⁹.

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10. Adapted from FCO 'Know Before You Go' campaign website: <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/staying-safe/health/hiv> [Accessed May 2010]

For further information, including case studies, factsheets, or to be put in touch with a travel health expert, contact Kirsty McKinnon and Laura Branch at Beattie Communications on 020 7053 6000 or email eightweeks@beattiegroup.com

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