

Tips for a Healthy and Safe Trip to South Africa

[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention CDC – safer, healthier people.

[Reyna Jones] I'm Reyna Jones and with me today is Dr. Gary Brunette, from CDC's Travelers' Health Branch. He was born in South Africa and lived there for many years. Dr. Brunette, thanks for joining us.

[Dr. Brunette] My pleasure, Reyna.

[Reyna Jones] Dr. Brunette, what are the best tips to prevent illness while traveling to South Africa?

[Dr. Brunette] South Africa, like many countries, is a wonderful place to experience new people, food, cultures, and activities. One of the simplest ways to stay healthy is by keeping up the basic healthy behaviors you do at home. Since germs can spread quickly from one person to the next, make sure you wash your hands often with soap and water. When soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand cleaner. When you are outdoors, use sunscreen and insect repellent.

Before you leave on your trip, see a doctor who is familiar with travel medicine to make sure you have all the vaccines and medicines you need for your particular medical history. Your doctor will also be able to share with you information about your specific trip that can help you stay healthy. For example, water contamination in South Africa is a bigger concern in rural areas than it is in the cities, so you will need to drink only bottled water or carbonated drinks when you are in the rural areas.

To learn more about the health risks of the particular areas you plan to visit, check out the CDC Travelers' Health website at www.cdc.gov/travel.

[Reyna Jones] Dr. Brunette, what are some recommendations travelers should keep in mind to stay healthy and safe?

[Dr. Brunette] Studies show that during travel, people are more willing to experiment with new things or participate in risky activities they might not do if they were at home. Be aware of the consequences of these experiences. The prevalence of HIV in South Africa is much higher than it is in the United States. If you are sexually active, use latex condoms to help prevent diseases like HIV or viral hepatitis.

By far, the most common illness among travelers is travelers' diarrhea. It is usually not dangerous, but it is uncomfortable and unpleasant and can keep you from having a good time. To help prevent it, resist the urge to purchase food and drinks offered by street vendors. Food and drinks that haven't been stored properly or cooked can foster germs that can give you stomach-related diseases such as travelers' diarrhea or typhoid.

Limit alcohol intake and refrain from drug use. Too much alcohol or use of drugs will impair your judgment and increase the likelihood that you might indulge in risky behaviors. The act of drink spiking or placing illegal drugs in another person's drink is on the rise, so be sure to keep an eye on your drink, and never accept a drink from a stranger. And of course, don't drink and drive or ride with someone who has been drinking.

[Reyna Jones] What about the best ways to prevent injuries and stay safe?

[Dr. Brunette] Basic safety tips can go a long way to help prevent injuries and keep you safe. Avoid touching and petting animals, especially dogs, which can transmit rabies. Remember to wear seatbelts whenever you're in a vehicle, and wear a helmet if you are riding a bicycle or motorbike. South Africans drive on the left-hand side of the road. It's the law to wear a seatbelt at all times when you're riding in a vehicle, and using a cell phone while driving is prohibited.

Crime is a serious problem in South Africa, so don't travel alone, especially at night. Make a plan with your family or friends so you can meet up if you get separated. It's also a good idea to limit the amount of cash you carry and to keep your belongings close to you at all times.

[Reyna Jones] Dr. Brunette, thanks for your time and all the helpful information. On behalf of CDC Travelers' Health we wish you a safe and healthy trip to South Africa.

The CDC Travelers' Health Branch is pleased to present this travel tip and wishes all travelers a safer, healthier trip.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.