

Safe and Healthy Travel to China

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

[Kelly Holton] Every year, thousands of people travel to China to experience the country's rich culture and heritage. CDC wants you to be safe and healthy so you can enjoy your trip. This is Kelly Holton and I'm speaking with Dr. Phyllis Kozarsky, a travel health specialist with CDC's Division of Global Migration and Quarantine. Dr. Kozarsky, thanks for joining us.

[Dr. Kozarsky] My pleasure.

[Kelly Holton] What are the major health issues that travelers to China should know about?

[Dr. Kozarsky] For those traveling to China, there are three important health risks that I want to pass along to you. First, you need to be aware of the risk of rabies. Most people get rabies through a bite or scratch from an infected animal. In many parts of the world, including China, dogs and other pets are not widely vaccinated against rabies as they are in the United States. Travelers should not pet or otherwise handle any animals, even ones that seem friendly. If you do get scratched or bitten, wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water and then go to a doctor or hospital right away. Travelers should also be aware of traveler's diarrhea, which is caused by consuming contaminated food or beverages, including water and ice. While this illness is usually not dangerous, it is uncomfortable and can certainly keep you from having a good time. You can reduce your risk by eating foods that are freshly cooked and served piping hot and by drinking beverages that are bottled and sealed or carbonated. Avoid raw or undercooked meat or seafood. Finally, seasonal influenza and other respiratory illnesses are very common in travelers. You can protect yourself from influenza by getting a flu vaccine, when available, at least two weeks before your trip if you're not already vaccinated. And as always, be sure to wash your hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand gel. You can learn more about these diseases and their symptoms, as well as get information specific to your destination, by going to www.cdc.gov/travel.

[Kelly Holton] O.K., so our listeners should make sure that they've had their flu shots. Do you recommend travelers to China get any other vaccines?

[Dr. Kozarsky] There are other vaccines that travelers should look into. The first is for hepatitis A, which is a liver disease you get from contaminated food and water. This vaccine is actually two shots that are given at least six months apart. If you have time to get only the first shot before you go to China, that's fine. The first dose will help protect you during this trip, and then you can get the second shot after you come home for lasting protection.

Travelers to China may also be at risk for Hepatitis B, which you can get from infected blood and other body fluids. Your doctor can help you decide if you should get the Hepatitis B vaccine before your trip.

You might also want to consider getting a vaccine for typhoid fever, which is another disease you can get from contaminated food and water. There are two types of vaccine against this disease – a shot or a course of four pills.

Finally, just make sure you're up-to-date on all routine vaccinations, such as Measles, Mumps, and Rubella - or MMR. Check with your doctor to see if you're due for any routine boosters.

[Kelly Holton] Dr. Kozarsky – I've seen on the news that some people in China and other Asian countries have been getting sick with bird flu...some have even died. Can you tell us about this disease?

[Dr. Kozarsky] Bird flu is very different from the seasonal influenza that people get in winter months. There are actually many strains of bird flu, and most of them only infect birds. However, one particular strain, called H5N1, has infected both birds and some people. H5N1 has been detected in wild birds and poultry in many countries in Asia, Africa, and Europe. This virus kills almost all poultry that become infected. The virus is still rare in people, but a large number of human cases have died, so it's a very serious illness.

[Kelly Holton] So how can travelers to China protect themselves from bird flu?

[Dr. Kozarsky] People should avoid going to bird farms or live bird markets while in Asia. Don't touch live, sick, or dead birds, or any surfaces that have bird feces, blood, or other body fluids on them. Wash your hands often with soap and water, or use an alcohol-based hand gel if soap and water aren't available. Cover your mouth and nose when you cough, and be sure to wash your hands afterwards.

[Kelly Holton] That's great advice. So now travelers know not to touch birds, but what if they want to eat chicken or duck. Is it safe?

[Dr. Kozarsky] It's entirely safe to eat these meats if they're cooked properly. Travelers need to make sure that all meat and other foods from birds, like eggs, are fully cooked. When you're cooking, always keep raw meats away from other foods. After touching raw poultry or eggs, wash your hands and all surfaces, dishes, and utensils thoroughly with soap and water.

[Kelly Holton] Great. Do you have any other advice for travelers?

[Dr. Kozarsky] Every destination, even in different areas of the same country, will have unique health issues that travelers need to know about. For example, travelers going to rural areas of certain provinces in China are at risk for malaria, while those only going to Beijing or other big cities are not. The best advice is to visit www.cdc.gov/travel to read about the health risks in your destination and how to protect you and your family.

[Kelly Holton] Are there any other risks travelers should be aware of?

[Dr. Kozarsky] One other major risk to be aware of are injuries, which are the leading cause of preventable death among travelers.

[Kelly Holton] I didn't realize that. What's the source of all these injuries?

[Dr. Kozarsky] Road traffic injuries are the most common and are the leading cause of injury-related deaths, worldwide. Travelers should always wear a safety belt in a moving vehicle when available, ride in marked taxis, and use caution when crossing the street. If you're traveling in a developing country, don't drive at night. And just like at home, never drink and drive.

[Kelly Holton] That's a great reminder. Now, changing gears a bit, how can families keep their kids safe and healthy while they're traveling?

[Dr. Kozarsky] Parents should be aware that all the health risks we've been talking about apply to children, as well. There are, however, two diseases that require special precautions with kids. The first is rabies. Children often like to play with animals, but it may put them at risk for rabies. Teach your children not to touch any animals while you're traveling. The second is diarrhea, which commonly affects children. Parents should frequently wash toys and other objects that their child may put in his or her mouth. Encourage kids to wash their hands. Parents may also want to bring along a health kit for their children, including an alcohol-based hand sanitizer and any medications their child may need.

[Kelly Holton] Well, this has been very helpful. Is there anything else you can think of that travelers to China need to know?

[Dr. Kozarsky] Make an appointment for you and your family to see a travel medicine specialist or health-care provider familiar with giving travel advice before you leave, preferably four to six weeks before your trip. If you're leaving in less than four weeks, you should still see a health-care provider before travel. During the appointment, tell the doctor where you'll be traveling and ask about any precautions you should take and medicines or shots you need. Be sure that you and your family are up-to-date on all your routine vaccinations, including the seasonal flu vaccine. Also, talk to the doctor about additional safety precautions to take while traveling with children. And finally....please enjoy your trip!

[Kelly Holton] Dr. Kozarsky, thanks for sharing this important travel information with our listeners. On behalf of Dr. Kozarsky and the rest of CDC's travelers' health team, we wish you a safe and healthy trip!

[Announcer] The CDC Travelers' Health and Animal Importation 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.