



Tips for healthy winter travel

Q Can you offer any unique health tips that winter travelers should know about whether they are planning to visit a cold or a warm climate?

A Yes. Whether seeking out snowy climes or the warm sun, winter travelers should consider the following five seasonal health tips:

1. Get a flu shot.

A lot of good evidence suggests that everyone — especially travelers in contact with many people over a short period of time — should consider a flu shot.

During the winter, when people carry viruses in enclosed spaces, the likelihood of transmitting them increases.

Just waiting in crowded airports increases the chances of catching the flu and other airborne viruses.

Although studies have shown that recirculated air on airplanes does not appear to increase the risk of catching colds or flu (unless you are seated near somebody who is sick), just being in enclosed spaces in close proximity to others during the winter flu season can put you at increased risk.

Flu shots are safe, effective and not generally associated with side effects.

Some people think you can get a mild case of influenza from the shots, but this is not true.

2. Be prepared when flying with a cold.

See a doctor or pharmacist for a decongestant and nasal spray.

A simple winter cold can cause unpleasant complications in an airplane because pressure builds up in the ear canal and sinuses during takeoff and landing.

Decongestants work best when taken an hour before departure.

Nasal sprays should be used just before takeoff and descent.

Those with severe cases of sinusitis or fluid behind the ears should consider postponing their trip.

Decongestants and nasal sprays may not help them, and those with a lot of fluid behind the ear could perforate the eardrum when air pressure changes in the plane.

3. Block out the sun.

For anyone traveling from a cold climate to a sunny one, exposure to more intense ultraviolet rays can cause a severe burn.

These travelers should wear a sunblock with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or more.

Sunscreen

B I O



DR. BRADLEY CONNOR IS A NEW YORK-BASED TRAVEL MEDICINE

SPECIALIST AND MEMBER OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF TRAVEL MEDICINE.

should even be worn under mesh or loose-weave clothing.

Shade the face with wide-brimmed hats and wear sunglasses that guard against ultraviolet A and B rays.

Those who are set on getting a winter tan should become acclimated gradually.

Also, be aware that many common medications — particularly some antibiotics — increase the chance of getting a severe sunburn.

4. Eat wisely in hot climates.

Hot, sunny climates can lead to dehydration. It is important, therefore, for travelers to destinations where the temperature is high to drink

plenty of fluids.

It is equally important, however, to be careful about what to drink.

In most tropical destinations, tap water should be avoided.

Even noncarbonated bottled beverages should be consumed with caution as some products labeled “bottled water” are simply local tap water in a bottle.

If a bottled beverage is sealed, it is most likely to be safe.

You can assume that carbonated beverages are bottled at a bottling plant and are therefore safe.

Food is another issue in tropical destinations.

Salads and buffet items, which may become easily contaminated in the midday sun, should be avoided.

The skin of fruits should be intact and peeled with clean hands. The safest meals are freshly cooked and served piping hot. If cold food is the only option, eat dry food such as bread, cereals and crackers.

5. Bundle up against the cold.

Travelers vacationing in colder climates are at risk for hypothermia.

These travelers should wear layered clothing and minimize alcohol intake.

Alcohol can give a false sense of warmth and hinder the body's ability to adjust to drops in temperature.

Travelers who take medication for hypertension or heart disease should check with their doctor because some of these medications may increase susceptibility to the harmful effects of the cold.

This column is designed to answer agent questions of general interest to the trade. Please address your questions to Dr. Connor at bconnor@pol.net.