



# Travelling safely with CHILDREN



## General

Children can make a holiday but also some of the most harrowing experiences abroad are associated with them getting sick, having an accident, getting lost or being bitten by an animal while away from home. If you are planning a trip with young children then take some sensible care.

## Passports

Make sure that you have passports covering each of the children and that all the passports are well in date with usually at least a six month expiry date. Spare up-to-date photographs (of all the party) are a great safety feature in case someone gets lost.

## Travelling with other children

Travelling with a lone child is not usually the easiest and so it may be worth considering inviting a playmate to accompany your family while abroad. Remember the extra responsibilities this places on you personally and make sure you have sufficient authority (and insurance cover) to give consent should any form of medical intervention be required. Travelling through some immigration check points with another person's child can also lead to delayed transit as you try to explain that you are not really kidnapping the child!

## Vaccinations & Malaria

Very often the children may need less vaccines than the parents as their childhood ones will still be active. However, the recent trend to consider measles, mumps and rubella as mild illnesses means that many children have not completed their usual childhood vaccines (eg MMR) and so they will frequently be at significantly higher risk as they travel to countries where these air borne diseases are much more common. Also, if malaria is a risk in the destination you plan to visit then the risk will be the same for all the party members and prophylaxis may be recommended.

## Entertainment

Children need to be constantly entertained. With this in mind it is essential that you book your holiday in the knowledge that they will also have a good time. Is the destination suitable for children? "Interesting" ruins are fine for a day or two but not for the entire holiday! If you really do want a peaceful holiday make sure you have a sufficient supply of games, toys and books to keep them amused. If sensible facilities are not provided for children then they tend to seek out their own entertainment. This may involve them wandering away from the adults. Always make sure that children know the name of the place where you are staying. Try to pick up the hotel or site visitor's card and put one into your children's pockets.

## Family Plan for lost children

Have a family plan in case someone goes missing. One plan is to return to the last spot where you can remember meeting together. Remember what clothing your children are wearing each day and, if you have a choice, go for easily identifiable colours, not forgetting that nice bright hats are easy to identify in a crowd. The ubiquitous helium-filled balloon, tied to the wrist, is a great asset to find the child who delights in wandering! Even though you may feel a bit silly, having a distinct 'family whistle' is often a great asset in a crowded market or shopping centre.

## Exploration

Exploration and children go hand in hand. Just watch out for those potentially dangerous caves, holes, cliffs and street alleys. In some of the very crowded adventure parks children may even be kidnapped. Try to make sure that your child knows what to do if approached by a stranger.

## Sun Exposure

One of the commonest problems with holidays is that of sunburn. Children run around without their shirts and very rapidly they are burnt. The next few days of your holiday will be a misery for them and for you also. Use high factor blocking lotions and cover them up well. Using T-shirts while swimming is usually fine though remember that this may somewhat weigh the child down. Never let a child swim alone. The child who is full of confidence is the greatest danger as they will tend to over exert themselves and may take risks with their personal health.

## Illnesses

Children have a habit of getting sick very quickly. Fortunately they generally recover at the same speed. If your child has a history of illness at home, assume that they may get a reoccurrence while abroad. Obviously supplies of medication for asthma, diabetes, migraine and other known conditions should be carried. Talk this all through with your doctor and see if any other medication might be worth considering. Make sure you have enough to get you through the complete time for your trip.

## Swimming

Small children love to swim and to run around close to the pool edge. Remember that a toddler will sink very rapidly and will drown within seconds in the deep end of the pool. In the open sea it can be very difficult to keep an eye on your children - especially if there are many others in the water. Wearing a brightly coloured bathing cap will make this somewhat easier. Always make certain that nobody is going to swim after a meal (at least one hour) and that you always pay close attention to local advice and any warning signs.

## Mosquito Bites

Children especially love to play outside in the early hours of dusk. This is usually the worst time for mosquitoes and other nasty biting insects. Good insect repellent is essential and there is only a very limited risk of toxicity, providing you wash it off well before the children retire for the night. In the hotel bedroom use the plug-in repellents and any bed nets if they are available. Spray around the curtains and alcoves and remember to make sure that the whole family take their malaria tablets if necessary.

## Animals

Encourage your children to stay away from all animals during your holiday. The risk of rabies may be quite small but having to search around for a good hospital to stitch any nasty bite will significantly alter your holiday plans.

## Food & Water

It will be important to make sure that the family takes plenty of fluid while staying in a hot region. They will also lose salt in their diet and so this is one of the times when it is probably a good idea to let children (and adults also) eat salted peanuts and crisps etc.

## Summary

Think through as to whether the destination will suit all the members of your party and don't forget the special needs of children. Very small children (less than 18 months) really will be totally unaware of the holiday destination and so in most cases they would prefer to have been left at home in their familiar surroundings. The only really safe time to travel with children is when they are over 18 years of age and so not your responsibility any more!

## Further information

The Tropical Medical Bureau web pages carry a wide range of information on staying healthy while travelling and all the latest travel news, vaccines and health reports. [www.tmb.ie](http://www.tmb.ie)

National Travel Vaccine Appointment Tel 1-850-48 76 74

Web Address: [www.tmb.ie](http://www.tmb.ie)

This leaflet has been prepared using information supplied from WHO, the Center for Disease Control (US) and other international sources.

- ✓ Travel Accessories *Children/TMB/updated16May2006*
- ✓ Tropical Diagnostic Laboratory
- ✓ Tropical Disease Screening Centre
- ✓ W.H.O. registered Yellow Fever Vaccination Centre
- ✓ International Vaccination and Malaria Advice Centres

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