



TRAVELLER'S DIARRHEA

What is traveller's diarrhea?

Traveller's diarrhea is an increase in the frequency of loose or watery bowel movements. There are many causes, particularly bacteria, but also viruses and parasites. It is the most frequent health problem encountered by travellers to tropical countries. High-risk destinations include most of the developing countries of Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.

What are the symptoms of traveller's diarrhea?

Symptoms usually appear within the first week of travel, but may occur anytime or even after returning home. The diarrhea is commonly associated with stomach pain, nausea, vomiting, fever and generally feeling unwell. Most cases resolve in one to two days.

How is traveller's diarrhea spread?

Many organisms that cause traveller's diarrhea live in the intestines of infected people and animals and are found in feces. The organisms may be found in soil, food, water, or surfaces that have been contaminated with infected feces. The disease is spread by eating food contaminated with the bacteria or by putting a contaminated object in one's mouth. For example, water can be contaminated with sewage or animal feces. Meat can be contaminated with feces during the slaughter process. Food and surfaces can be contaminated by contact with infected feces from a person's hands.

Most cases of traveller's diarrhea are associated with poor sanitary conditions or poor personal hygiene. Food can be contaminated by contact with the unwashed hands of infected kitchen workers, by contact with human feces where it is used as a fertiliser, or from washing with sewage-contaminated water. Both cooked and uncooked foods can be involved if they have not been handled properly.

Who can get traveller's diarrhea?

Anyone can get traveller's diarrhea.

Can traveller's diarrhea be treated?

Persons with diarrhea should drink lots of liquids to avoid dehydration. Several non-prescription drugs can provide relief for the symptoms of traveller's diarrhea. Consult your family doctor for advice and treatment if you have bloody or severe diarrhea.

How can traveller's diarrhea be prevented?

Practice good personal hygiene. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after using the toilet, after handling animals, after handling raw meats, and before preparing or eating food.

Practice basic food safety precautions. Wash or peel all raw vegetables and fruits before eating. Thoroughly cook all meats (meat, poultry and seafood). Prevent contact of cooked foods with raw meats or poultry. Drink and eat only pasteurized dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt).

Avoid water that might be contaminated. Do not drink untreated surface water. Do not drink tap water or use ice that is not chlorinated. Avoid swallowing water when swimming or bathing.

International travellers should inquire about vaccine-preventable diseases before departure.

For additional information, contact your local Public Health office or your family doctor.