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## EXPLORING THE DEEP BLUE SEA

*By: Cindy Williams, RN, BSN*

*Passport Health, Baltimore, Maryland*

Some of the most beautiful scenery in the world is that which is underwater. In exploring these incredible places, common sense is simply the best way of avoiding injury. Coral cuts are probably the most common injury associated with water exploration, whether it is surfing, diving, snorkeling, or just enjoying the water.

Coral is an animal that makes calcified outer skeletons which make sharp, jagged edges. These edges easily cut through the skin. Damage results from fragments of coral in the wound, toxins from the coral tentacles and infection with bacteria. Injury may cause redness and hive-like welts that may develop into a festering sore. Healing may take 3 to 6 weeks and scarring can occur. Severe injuries may result in blood vessel, muscle, nerve, tendon or bone damage.

To prevent injury, avoid standing on coral reefs. Not only does this protect the individual, but helps to preserve the reef as well. Wearing reef shoes, gloves and wet suits will also protect against injury.

If injured, promptly scrub the coral cuts with soap and water. Flush the wound with copious amounts of fresh water to remove any fragments of coral. Rinsing with vinegar or rubbing alcohol may help relieve stinging. Contrary to popular beliefs by locals in Hawaii, urinating in the wound is of no value!

If there are any signs of infection, antibiotic and other treatment modalities may be

needed. Signs of infection include:

- Increased swelling, pain, redness, tenderness, or heat
- Red streaks extending from the affected area
- Pustular discharge
- Fever of 100 degrees or higher not associated with any other cause

One should also seek medical attention if the cut is large and requires sutures (stitches). If there is numbness, tingling, loss of feeling, or the inability to move a limb below the wound, one should also seek medical attention.

If there is no evidence of infection, an over-the-counter steroid cream such as hydrocortisone may be used to relieve the itching. Discomfort may be relieved with Tylenol or ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil) as per bottle instructions. In addition, you should also ensure that your tetanus shot is up to date. If it has been 5 years or more since your last tetanus immunization, it is recommended that this be updated at this time.

Exploring the deep blue sea can be very exciting. Just remember, the common sense approach can prevent injury. ■

## 10 AIRLINE SAFETY TIPS

*By: Peter Savage, Author of The Safe Travel Book  
Director of Security for Passport Health*

1. In crowded terminals or flights, try to find a buddy in line or in the seat next to you if traveling alone, so that you are watching his or her bags at the counter or on board and he or she is watching yours.
2. When putting your carry on baggage through the x-ray belt, put your laptop last so that it comes out behind your other luggage, and, with luck, about the same time you are cleared to pick it up—or, better yet, have a buddy that has cleared security keep an eye on your laptop until you have cleared security.
3. Put your luggage in the overhead bin across the aisle from you so that you can see that no one is opening your luggage during the flight. Overhead storage bins may not be able to hold very heavy objects during turbulence, so if you or another passenger is having trouble lifting an article into the bin, have it stored elsewhere.
4. Dress for comfort and safety—best protection from heat and fire is natural fiber (cotton, denim, leather, wool) so avoid synthetics and bear in mind that the safety slide is pretty rough material and the end has strips of Velcro, so a skirt and panties will not survive the trip down—women should use natural fiber slacks.
5. The safest seating is on the exit aisle in the back of the airplane—usually farthest from impact and farthest from explosive fuel.
6. The time for greatest concern is during take-off and landing so nonstop flights reduce exposure to these most accident prone phases of flight. You should have an evacuation plan in mind—memorize how many rows to the exit aisle. Choose larger aircraft whenever possible, as larger aircraft provide a better opportunity for passenger survival. Planes with more than 30 ► 2



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## 10 AIRLINE SAFETY TIPS *continued from page 1*

By: Peter Savage, Author of *The Safe Travel Book*

Director of Security for Passport Health

passenger seats are designed and certified under the strictest regulations.

7. Always carry a pen light flashlight for use in an emergency when no other source of light may be available. Follow directions from the flight crew and exit the aircraft as quickly as possible.
8. If you are traveling over water, make sure you know how to locate and don your life jacket or floatation device. The primary reason flight attendants are on an aircraft is for safety, so if one of them asks you to do something like fasten your seat belts, **do it** — ask questions later.
9. Carry your passport even on domestic flights. During a crisis U.S. flights may be diverted to Mexican or Canadian airports and having a passport will facilitate the border crossing.
10. Don't drink too much alcohol! The atmosphere in an airliner cabin is pressurized to about the same altitude as Denver, so any alcohol you consume will affect you more than at sea level. Moderation is a good policy at any altitude. Drinking non-caffeinated products is a good practice as well.

Some aspects of the check in and security screening process are pretty routine and well known, but travelers often overlook some obvious points. Do not lock your bags because the TSA (Transportation and Safety Administration) may have to open your bag for inspection. Refer to the TSA website for updates on restrictions ([www.tsa.dot.gov](http://www.tsa.dot.gov)). Limitations on carry-on items are now strictly enforced to one carry-on item and one personal item, such as a laptop, handbag or briefcase, and size restrictions should be observed. A packing list will assure you of what is missing after an inspection—and don't pack anything that may potentially cause you personal embarrassment. For ease of clearing security, limit the amount of metal on your person and put all metal objects—watch, pens, coins, keys, cell phone—in a zip-lock bag stowed in your carry on luggage pocket. That leaves only a belt buckle and shoes with metal to be

removed. If you have a complaint about TSA's clearance process, do not raise it until you have already cleared security, then get the proper forms to file (otherwise you will be a long time being cleared, if at all).

International trips require a higher standard of care and planning. Different screening processes may be used in other countries and this and other security issues should be researched in advance.

A general safety checklist includes many of the standard provisions and is a good review.

- Wear a safety strap for eyeglasses and bring an extra pair just in case they are broken, lost or stolen.
- Always carry your International Certificate of Vaccination - ICV (yellow book) so that medical personnel can rule out certain diseases if you become ill.
- Your ICV will contain all recent vaccinations for travel as well as have sections to document any chronic medical conditions, blood type, allergies, and eyeglass prescription.
- It is always a good idea to list your blood type on your passport and to make photocopies of your passport and visa.
- Stow passports & visas independently of your originals (carry two extra passport photos in case your passport is lost or stolen).
- I always carry an emergency escape smoke hood as well. A smoke hood will give you extra time to breathe filtered air during an escape from a smoke filled cabin. Smoke hoods are available for about \$600.00 from Quick Mask at 772-221-4624.

***Bon voyage and safe smiles!*** ■

## READER COMMENTS

Martin Adler warns travelers after his sister's accident. "I travel a lot and know the ins and outs of overseas travel thanks to Passport Health. Unfortunately my sister didn't. She decided to take a bargain basement trip to Mexico. This turned out to be far from a vacation. She and her friends decided to bus into the city dressed to the hilt with high heels on after drinking quite a bit. Needless to say it ended in a trip to a Mexican hospital after stepping off the bus into a pothole. She was told she had a sprain and was sent on her way. A day later she was out of there and back in the states to a local hospital where her injuries were diagnosed properly—two broken ankles!"

Sarah Barzoloski got dengue fever and describes the pain. "With dengue fever you get a high fever. I don't know how high, but someone later told me that it fries your brain and you feel like you are going crazy for about 6 months. Instead of a hammer on your head and joints, it feels like a 100 lb sledgehammer on your head and joints. You also get a rash all over your body and your eyes get infected. It lasts about 3 days. It stays away for a couple of days and then it hits again for a few days. There is no medication. I took benadryl and darvon, enough so that I would sleep and not feel the pain."

Carroll & Iris Brashears often visit their daughter and son-in-law living in Nicaragua. "Learn to say 'No Chico,' as the locals will attack you with their homemade pastries and plastic bags of colored water.

Everything looks good, especially if you are hungry, but don't succumb to the temptation if you want to stay well. If you go to the market don't take a purse and keep your hand in your pocket where your money is at all times."

Greg Rosenthal was in New Delhi, India for a friend's wedding. "We were fairly isolated but even so people tried to extort money. It is best not even to talk to street people, as it is difficult to get away and never touch any of the products they are selling because they refuse to take it back. Don't accept elephant rides because you are taken a distance away and bribed for your return."

Gertrude Williams recently returned from Ghana. "The first week was great. My niece and I ventured beyond the city to Tofu during our second week and I became very ill from the local food. I couldn't keep anything down and had a high fever. I finally had to be hospitalized. The hospital was clean and I was able to leave after only one day. When the staff found out I was an American the bill went up. Fortunately we were able to pay in cash. Almost everyone in our group experienced diarrhea and I was able to help them out with my supplies from Passport Health. Things could have been a lot worse if the Passport Health staff had not prepared me. I do recommend taking the insurance and some small cans of food so you don't have to eat at out of the way places."

# INSECT BORNE DISEASES--HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

By: Fran Lessans, RN, BSN, MS

The best two behaviors for avoiding illness in tropical and developing countries are to protect yourself against insects and take food and beverage precautions. Although these two precautions seem simple, in reality many travelers succumb to diseases transmitted through insects and/or food and water.

Since we have vaccines and prophylactic medications available for some insect borne diseases travelers often give the insect issue less attention than they should. We still do not have vaccines or medications available to treat many insect borne diseases like Dengue Fever, Lyme Disease, West Nile Virus, African Sleeping Sickness, Plague, Sand Fly Fever, Rift Valley Fever, Scrub Typhus, Leishmaniasis and Loiasis to mention just a few.

Fortunately many of the above mentioned diseases are rare for tourists but often their rareness makes them hard to recognize and treat. Therefore, the best treatment is prevention and the best prevention is a repellent with 20-30% DEET for exposed skin and permethrin on clothing, netting, bedding and travel gear. Using the combination of DEET and Permethrin is an essential step in preventing insect bites. Used in conjunction and appropriately, you can expect 99% protection. These products are effective and necessary to safeguard your health. We do not recommend citronella, oil or plant based repellents because of their relatively poor efficacy.

Long before the advent of synthetic chemicals, people used plant-derived substances to repel mosquitoes. Plants whose essential oils are reported to have repellent activity include citronella, camphor, clove, geranium, soybean, eucalyptus, peppermint and others. Citronella is the most common botanical oil found in natural repellents. However, when compared to DEET they only lasted from minutes to under 2 hours. Oil applied to the skin will retard mosquitoes as long as the oil sits on the skin. As soon as the oil is absorbed, the mosquitoes and other flying insects will bite. Skin-so-soft an oil based skin softener received quite a bit of attention as a repellent because people noticed that they were not bitten after application. This phenomenon sparked a whole new advertising campaign for the distributor and to this day, people still believe the product has good repellent capabilities. Americans tend to stay outside for shorter periods and therefore the product may protect for a few hours if it is applied thickly. Travelers are usually outdoors for longer periods of time and if bitten, may cause a disease that is not present in the United States.

Clothing provides a physical barrier to biting insects, provided it is sufficiently thick or tightly woven. For increased protection, especially when there is more intense mosquito activity you should wear long-sleeved shirts and slacks. Tucking your pant leg into your socks or boots can prevent both mosquito bites and tick attachment. In hot, humid climates, long sleeved shirts of thickly woven fabric may be uncomfortable. Clothing protection is dramatically increased when the fabric is sprayed or impregnated with permethrin. If traveling in a group, permethrin used by all members of the group will enhance protection for everyone in the group, as a barrier ring is formed.

It also pays to give careful attention to eating and sleeping accommodations. Patronize facilities that appear clean and insect free and are either well screened or air-conditioned so that the windows can be kept tightly closed, especially during mosquito peak feeding times (dusk to dawn and on overcast or cloudy days). Avoid open-air restaurants and outdoor buffets, where food and beverages may be exposed to flying insects. Avoid wearing colognes and perfumed products wherever insects are likely to bite. Use only unscented hygiene products, such as hair sprays, deodorants and soaps. Also, avoid wearing jewelry and brightly colored clothing. Dress in pale colors like light green, tan and khaki and cover up as much as possible. Do not walk with bare feet, since many biting insects crawl on the ground or fly within several inches of it. At the beach or pool, lie on a lawn chair or at a minimum, on a blanket or long beach towel. Do not lay your clothes directly on the ground, since the perspiration or other scents on them may attract insects. Instead, put your clothes on a lawn chair or blanket and always inspect under collars and cuffs and shake them vigorously before putting them back on.

Avoid swimming in small ponds and lagoons. Non-moving bodies of fresh water are the favorite breeding grounds of mosquitoes. Similar cautions apply when hiking. Avoid areas near stagnant pools and marshes. And after long hikes, take a shower and check your body for embedded insects.

Now that you have taken all the necessary precautions, you must know how to select the best repellent for optimal protection, as not all repellents are created equal. Although there are repellents with 20% to 30% DEET they may be made using an alcohol, oil or water base and this means that the product is absorbed or evaporates too quickly to provide long term protection. The new Passport Health Controlled Release formula uses a patented Sub Micron Encapsulation process by which the DEET is captured inside a Mircale protein. Each microscopic particle of protein contains chambers, which hold the DEET. Over a period of up to 24 hours your skin slowly dissolves the protein particles. As the particles are dissolved, DEET is released from the chambers for evaporation and your skin is nourished by the dissolved proteins. At any point in time you may simply wash the remaining formula off your skin with soap and water.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends use of repellents with lower concentrations of DEET for children. Reducing unnecessary skin exposure of DEET is good for adults too. Because of the way the Sub Micron Encapsulation system works, the Passport Health Controlled Release formula actually exposes the children's skin to less DEET than traditional low DEET formulas, while increasing the level of protection.

Remember the best way to avoid insect bites—and the diseases that insects transmit—is to apply a DEET repellent to your exposed skin and treat your clothing with permethrin. The effectiveness of this combination is confirmed by many studies. In one study, conducted in Alaska, the use of permethrin-treated clothing and a 30% DEET product afforded 99.9% protection. In comparison, untreated control subjects sustained over 1000 bites per hour! ■



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*or write to:*

**Fran Lessans, R.N., B.S.N., M.S.**  
**Passport Health**  
**921 East Fort Avenue, Suite 100**  
**Baltimore, Maryland 21230**

**Q.** My friends and I are planning a backpacking trip through Southeast Asia. We are planning to take a month for our tour. Is there anything special you would recommend for backpackers?

**A.** Backpackers comprise individuals who travel alone or in a small group on a limited budget, and usually stay in hostels, campsites, or similar low-cost accommodations and carry their belongings in backpacks. Due to the nature of travel, backpackers are at increased risk for injuries and gastrointestinal illness. Other common problems are insect bites, sunburn, headaches, lacerations, coral cuts and ear infections. It is important to schedule your pre-travel immunizations at least 6 to 8 weeks prior to travel so that all immunizations requiring a series can be completed prior to travel. Have appropriate supplies available such as

water purification, first-aid kit, mosquito net, repellants, etc. Backpackers need reinforcement on sun protection, marine hazards, venomous creatures and animals, protection against insects, safe sex practices and security issues. It is also important to register with the embassy or diplomatic mission, which in some cases can be done online. Travel insurance is a must for the backpacker. It is also a good idea to take an adequate supply of high-calorie food for the expected duration of the expedition, plus extra. A telephone is another good idea if service is available. With a little preparation and common sense, the backpacking experience can be an exciting experience.

**Q.** I am going to Nepal; do I need to take Malaria prophylaxis?

**A.** Malaria transmission in Nepal varies according to altitude, geographic area, and the seasons. In the southern low-lying area known as the Terai, malaria is transmitted all year round, albeit with seasonal variation. In the cooler hills and valleys, malaria transmission is intensely seasonal and ceases altogether above about 1,200 meters. Although the Kathmandu Valley is free from malaria, significant transmission has been noted in the district of Kavre immediately to its East. Recommendations are based on many variables and travelers should take into consideration that plans often change after they are in country.

**Q.** I am traveling to Africa and know that some vaccinations are required but I am concerned

that the vaccines may cause illness.

**A.** Unfortunately there is a lot of misinformation and anti-vaccine rhetoric perpetuated on the Internet and in the lay press. The public has little understanding of the vaccine development process. Prior to FDA approval, vaccines are put through controlled clinical trials and rigorous licensing procedures. FDA approved vaccines are safe and effective.

**Q.** Why do I always have ear pain during flight descent and is there anything I can do?

**A.** As an aircraft ascends, atmospheric pressure decreases and air expands. The air in the middle ear also expands and passes through the Eustachian tubes to the back of the nose, which equalizes pressure without causing any pain. However, if the Eustachian tube is blocked (e.g., by mucus at the back of the nose), the air remains in the middle ear cavity, balloons against the surrounding tissue, and causes pain. Pain more commonly occurs during descent of the aircraft, when air contracts. The reason for this is that the Eustachian tubes are usually only partially blocked, and the tubes then act as one-way valves. Because of the anatomy of the tubes, air can get out of the middle ear far more readily during ascent than it can get back in during descent. As a result, a vacuum develops in the middle ear during descent. This vacuum pulls in on surrounding tissue, resulting in pain.

Ear Planes relieve in flight ear discomfort by