



PASSPORT

# PASSPORT HEALTH®

First Class Medical Care For Travel Anywhere

Toll Free: 1-888-499-PASS (7277)

The Vaccine People

Vol. 16, No. 1

Spring 2006

## JOURNAL ENTRY BY NORA MOYNIHAN DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY ENRICHMENT PORT DISCOVERY CHILDREN'S MUSEUM, BALTIMORE

*We left Chendu at 6 am. I knew it was going to be a hard day from the moment I opened my eyes at 4:30 am. My chest burned, my nose was running, no appetite. I boarded the bus and covered my face with my scarf, put my head against the window and closed my eyes. I couldn't stand the sound of voices around me...I tried to block them out and breathe. The airport was packed but so quiet you could hear a pin drop- something I noticed at all of the public transportation stations- quiet and very clean (well, except for the bathrooms). I had a hard time carrying my bags to the gate however; a fellow traveler helped me along the way, which was a great relief since I was starting to feel like my legs would give out from under me. Finally, I boarded the plane- relief. Again, we were a spectacle... the only tourists. There were lots of stares and smiles. They are as curious about us as we are about them! I found my seat and caught my breath. The plane took off and I thought for a moment that I might be able to rest and feel a little better. I talked to the people on either side of me and nibbled on the traditional Chinese breakfast that was offered. The plane made its way through the two-hour flight to Lhasa and upon decent I noticed from the window the most beautiful mountain range! We were here! Lhasa air port- the moment I had dreamed of- I was really going to be in Tibet! People began to sing- I never experienced such a thing in an airplane. As I walked off the airplane and into the airport...it hit me. The combination of being sick and the altitude struck me at once. As I walked my lungs hurt- I was short of breath- my limbs ached- sharp shooting pains in my head... even my teeth felt like they hurt. I had been taking the altitude medication for two days but it must not have been working fast enough. In the terminal, I sat down on the floor with a fellow passenger to wait for others that were using the rest room. My fingers were tingling and feeling a little numb. I started feeling worried but... I was in Tibet... I would get through it. I boarded the bus that was to take us on a two-hour ride from the airport to Lhasa. As we drove down the bumpy and at times unpaved roads- getting what we started to call our "free massage" I stared out the window to see brick stones being made into flat houses, men washing barley in garbage filled streams, prayer flags blowing in the wind with garbage swirling around them. As I sat there bundled up with my welcome prayer shawl around my neck- I stared out the window at the beauty of the mountains in the distance and the garbage riding the wind under my nose. Tibet is a place of opposites! Along the way we stopped by the side of the road to visit a family working with a couple of yaks. Beautiful people- women with baskets on their backs, running noses on smiling children, rosy- pink cheeks. We got back on the bus and I was not feeling good at all- I was trying to keep up because I didn't want to miss anything- so far I had been succeeding. Stop 2- again, on the side of the road to see men crossing a river in a yak skin boat. There were yak dung patties drying on the rocks ► 3*

## FLU SHOTS: WHY DOESN'T MY DOCTOR HAVE THEM?!

For five of the last six years, this has been the question on the lips of many angry consumers. Doctors and hospitals should be ordering vaccine for the 2006-2007 flu season by January 2006 to have a higher probability of getting the desired amount of vaccine. However, they may only receive half of the promised vaccine or none at all. When the vaccine does arrive, it often comes in dribs and drabs making it difficult for the practitioner to know how many shots to give and how many to hold back for the highest risk patients.

Except for the very young and very old, flu shots are not routine for most Americans. A recent study revealed that only about two-thirds of health care workers get an annual flu shot. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is considering urging that flu vaccinations be increased with schoolchildren since they are particularly efficient in spreading the virus. For healthy adults, getting the flu means missed time at work with production losses estimated in the millions of dollars annually. Each year, an estimated 36,000 Americans die from the flu.

Part of the problem lies with the vaccine manufacturers, the few that are still making flu vaccine. The process to make flu vaccine is difficult, timely and not very profitable. Since the flu vaccine is usable one season at a time, any unused vaccine would go to waste leading to great financial losses for manufacturers. To complicate matters, the handful of manufacturers in business are not able to produce ► 3



921 East Fort Avenue • Suite 100 • Baltimore, Maryland 21230  
410-727-0556 • Fax: 410-727-0696 • Toll-Free: 1-888-499-PASS (7277)

[www.passporthealthusa.com](http://www.passporthealthusa.com)

Call our main number for an appointment at any of our locations which include:  
Annapolis, Baltimore, Bel Air, Cockeysville, Columbia, Severna Park/Millersville

# TRAVEL ILLNESS BY REGION

Number of cases per 1,000 patients, by region

Cause or Illness	Caribbean	Central America	South America	Sub-Saharan Africa	South Central Asia	Southeast Asia
Malaria	65	133	133	622	139	130
Dengue Fever	238	123	138	7	142	135
Parasitic diarrhea*	283	403	368	353	453	262
Bacterial diarrhea**	260	190	253	250	294	369
Insect bite	192	235	156	194	201	179
Parasitic skin infestation	299	134	122	86	64	171
Intestinal worm infestation	278	273	256	307	202	344
Acute hepatitis	62	91	102	76	214	61
Animal bite needing rabies shots	3	13	25	9	90	124

\* Including giardia or amoebas \*\* Including campylobacter, shigella and salmonella

SOURCE: New England Journal of Medicine

According to a new study published in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, the best recommendation for staying well while traveling abroad can be as simple as using insect repellents, being careful about what you eat and drink and taking your malaria pills. This study is based on information collected at 30 travel and tropical medicine clinics on six continents known as the GeoSentinel Surveillance Network. The study was limited to illnesses treated after the traveler returned home and did not address issues such as heart attacks, strokes, and auto accidents, some of the deadlier threats to travelers.


According to the study, fever is the prime complaint for those seeking medical treatment. Malaria and dengue, transmitted by mosquitoes, are two of the causes of fever in travelers. In fact, dengue has become a larger problem than malaria in most regions. Sand flies can transmit Leishmaniasis and ticks can lead to rickettsial infections. The use of insect repellents containing DEET on exposed skin and Permethrin for outer clothing, bedding and mosquito netting are a first line of defense against these diseases as well as taking oral anti-malarial medications as directed. There is no vaccine currently available to prevent dengue fever.

Diarrhea is the second most common reason travelers seek medical attention. Acute cases of diarrhea can occur from food and water contaminated with bacteria or from viral infections. However, the GeoSentinel records revealed that chronic diarrhea, frequently from

parasitic infestation, is now a more common cause of traveler's diarrhea. Being careful about what you put in your mouth will go a long way in reducing your risks of developing diarrhea while away from home. Taking along medications to treat diarrhea and oral rehydration formulas is a prudent recommendation.

Skin problems including insect bites and hookworm infections are the third most frequent complaint among travelers seeking medical care after returning home. Tick bites in sub-Saharan Africa and parasitic skin infestations in the Caribbean have become more problematic in recent years. Travelers are encouraged to steer clear of lying on grassy areas, avoid swimming in lakes, rivers or other fresh bodies of water, especially after a heavy rainfall, and avoid walking barefoot or allowing your skin to come into contact with earthen matter - muddy riverbanks for example.

Additional tips for a safe and healthy trip include getting all recommended vaccinations well before departure, drink only canned or bottled beverages and wipe off cans and bottles before opening. Use bottled water for brushing teeth, avoid raw foods like salads and uncooked vegetables, unpasteurized milk and milk products, and raw or undercooked meats or fish, mayonnaise and dressings. Eat food that is cooked and still hot and fruits you can peel yourself. Giving some thought and attention to health issues can help prevent illness and a spoiled trip. ■



**PASSPORT HEALTH**  
*The Vaccine People*

- Convenient locations with evening and weekend hours
- Complete country specific travel counseling with briefing book
- Yellow Fever immunization site
- Pre-and post-travel medical care
- Security briefings available
- Full line of hard to find travel supplies including: repellents, water purification, mosquito netting, etc.

Call Us Toll-Free  
**1-888-499-(PASS) 7277**  
Or Check Out Our Web Site  
[www.passporthealthusa.com](http://www.passporthealthusa.com)

## FLU SHOTS

*continued from page 1*

even half of the 180 million doses needed to vaccinate all Americans at risk of complications from the flu or those in direct contact with patients at high risk.

Another part of the challenge belongs to government health officials throughout the nation. Resolving the problem would require federal buy back of unused vaccine at the end of the season.

Passport Health is the largest private purchaser of vaccines in the nation. We have consistently been able to meet our commitments to providing flu shots not only for our travel clients but for large and small corporations, schools and physician's offices. Passport Health offices around the country are currently booking clinics for the 2006-2007 flu season and urge people to contact their local Passport Health specialist to secure a flu clinic now. ■

# JOURNAL ENTRY

continued from page 1

by the riverbank on one side, soon to be used to warm homes- tents on the other. This time, I got back in the bus and I was starting to have problems. I felt an ache in my entire body and thought I might throw up. I hid my face in my backpack and cried- I was sick and scared. I had never gotten sick on a trip before... what was happening? In my mind, I started going over everything I ate- drank- where I had been. As my fellow travelers got on the bus, I could feel some of them patting me on the back- they were as concerned as I was. We moved on to the next stop. Good news- a bathroom (well, I use the term loosely)! I paid the little girl guarding it so I could go in and squat over the trough-like area. I didn't care...my biggest concern was how I would get out of the squatting position with my legs feeling weak. Oh, and please don't let me fall in here!!!! Across from the bathroom area we heard there was a 1,000-year-old Buddha. I decided- there was no way I was going another step- it was back in the bus for me. I got to my seat and cried a little more. Ok, so I was really scared. I thought to myself, all I had to do was get to the hotel- once I laid down everything would be better. We arrived shortly thereafter. As I got off the bus I stumbled and felt like I would collapse- a fellow traveler caught and steadied me. In the hotel, there was quite a welcome committee- another prayer flag and a ritual that involved sand and water. Normally, I would have loved every minute of all this but not at that moment- I was afraid of ending up on the floor with the sprinkles of sand and water. They handed me a cup of sweet tea, which I proceeded to spill all over myself. I gave up. I collapsed onto a chair and waited for help. Our guide came and helped me to my room. I couldn't even take off my clothes- I just got on the bed, hiking boots and

all- and she covered me with a quilt. She gave me an oxygen pillow and checked me constantly throughout the night. She had soup and rice- which I never ate- brought to me. She was so good to me. As I lay in bed- I had chills, burned with heat, ached and moaned. Sometime after midnight, I woke up feeling a little better (at least that was my hope.) I thought, "Tomorrow is a new day- hopefully, I will be a new me. Tibet is such a place of opposites- I am having such a hard time but still- I am so glad to be here!"

No one wants to get sick on a trip! It's just NOT fun! Now, I laugh and say, "Well, it just added to the experience." However, I would have preferred it not have happened at all. What my journal entry didn't say was how I thought of Carol- my long time friend at Passport Health or how I went over, in my head, the guide she prepared for me (that I actually did read) that outlined everything I should and shouldn't do- what I needed to be careful of and what to do if I did get sick. I thought back over our conversations. I went through all the little packs that she prepared - diarrhea, bug, and first aid kits- looking at what I had on hand to help me through my situation. I ended up using the Cipro and decongestants, which over time helped a great deal.

What this experience has helped me to realize is that it's just not the vaccinations that are important but the preparation of knowledge and incidental medicines and accoutrements that you bring. Being prepared! Somehow, even though I have been through the process many times for many different trips- I always thought about Passport Health as the place I get immunized. Well, it's also the place that helps you be prepared for when something does happen and as I learned after many years of travel- eventually, something does. ■

## TRAVEL TRENDS: HOT SPOTS FOR 2006

Europe remains a top travel destination for Americans with the United Kingdom consistently remaining near the top of the list. France and Italy continue to run a close second and third for popular European travel. However, a newer interest among Americans is travel to Central and Eastern European destinations like Prague, Krakow, Warsaw, Dubrovnik and Budapest. One travel guidebook author states that "Prague is the best-preserved city in the region...and the best beer in Europe lands on your table there for 50 cents." The Dalmatian Coast beaches of Croatia on the Adriatic Sea are being compared to the Italian Riviera, only "cheaper". Montenegro, also on the Adriatic, is touted as having untouched white sands and time-capsule medieval villages.

China, both mainland China and Hong Kong, has seen a dramatic increase in American travelers and not just to Beijing and Shanghai. Recent statistics indicate a ten fold interest in China over most other Asian countries.

Wellness vacations have become appealing for travelers looking to combine the health benefits of a spa including yoga, meditation, massage, healthy menus and the like with golf and other recuperation activities. Wellness centers like the Aerie Resort on Vancouver Island in British Columbia and the Cambridge Beaches cottage colony in Bermuda are attracting health conscious travelers.

Before traveling to these or other foreign destinations, it is recommended that you visit your Passport Health specialist to evaluate your immunization record. Additional vaccinations may be in order for your particular destination. Your Passport Health specialist may also recommend a country specific malaria medication and can demonstrate which repellents are most effective against disease causing insects. ■

## JAPANESE ENCEPHALITIS IN THE CITIES

Japanese Encephalitis, a mosquito acquired flavivirus infection similar to Yellow Fever, occurs in Asia and until recently, was thought to be only a rural area concern. However, doctors from affected areas are reporting increasing numbers of cases in cities. Illness usually develops 5 to 15 days after infection and can include high fever, GI symptoms, change in mental status, headache followed by speech problems and can progress to stupor and coma and is fatal in 5-30% of cases. Risk increases during the rainy season. Protective measures include J.E. vaccination prior to travel, use of repellents, and Permethrin for outer clothing and mosquito netting and bedding.



**PRE-BOOK AN  
ON-SITE FLU CLINIC  
AT YOUR COMPANY**

**PRESORT STD  
US POSTAGE  
PAID  
Baltimore, MD  
Permit No. 6925**

*Forward Service Requested*

## Travel Questions

*Have a travel question?*

You can call: **410-727-0556** or  
**Toll-Free: 1-888-499-PASS (7277)**  
or fax your question to: **410-727-0696**

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 husband needs to work in Peru for several months and we have a nine month old son. What can we do to reduce the chances of the baby getting mountain sickness?

**A.** The key to avoiding AMS is a rational ascent that gives your body time to acclimatize. People acclimatize at different rates, so no absolute statements are possible, but in general: your sleeping elevation should not increase more than 300 meters (1,000 feet) per night, and every 1,000 meters (3,000 feet) you should spend a second night at the same elevation. If you have a headache accompanied by loss of appetite, nausea, or vomiting, fatigue or weakness, dizziness or light-headedness, difficulty sleeping, confusion or staggering gait do not ascend any higher. Diamox has been shown to assist in reducing the affects and can be given to those without allergic reactions to sulfur medications. Anybody can get Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS). AMS repre-

sents the body's intolerance of the hypoxic (low oxygen) environments. There is no prevalence based on age, gender, physical fitness, or previous altitude experience. If you know what to do, you should be able to avoid the severe, life-threatening forms.

**Q.** I am taking a year off to sail to some remote destinations. I have been immunized with the available vaccines but would like to get the Anthrax vaccine. Is it available for the traveling public?

**A.** The vaccine is currently available for military personnel only. The government is asking manufacturers to expand their production capabilities in order to meet the expected demand. The goal is to be able to immunize every citizen in a city following a bioterrorist attack. People would have to take antibiotics for several weeks while waiting for the vaccine to become effective. They would be protected against anthrax even if spores of the bacteria remain potent for years.

**Q.** I read an article in a magazine that suggests that taking calcium supplements when traveling to third-world countries will prevent traveler's diarrhea. Do you recommend doing this? If so, when should these be taken and in what dosage?

**A.** The study you are referring to was done in Holland and for only three weeks. It was not large or long enough to have statistical significance. For 10 days, the study group of men ate a standard diet, plus either regular milk products that supplied 1,100 milligrams of calcium daily or low-calcium milk products that supplied 60

milligrams. They were then given a weak strain of E-coli to cause mild diarrhea. Those taking the high-calcium products had less severe cases and recovered completely by the second day. Even if you put your faith in the study, the high calcium diet did not eliminate traveler's diarrhea; therefore, it is still advisable to take along our traveler's diarrhea kit which contains an antibiotic that would kill the bacteria.

**Q.** I often get colds after taking long plane trips and I heard that it is because the air on most flights is re-circulated and not refreshed. Is this true and if so, what can I do to protect my health?

**A.** The newest aircraft are often fitted with sophisticated HEPA filtration systems but this is not the case on many older airplanes still in use. Though many airline companies are hesitant to acknowledge re-circulating versus refreshing cabin air, doing so saves jet fuel by eliminating the energy cost of heating outside air. With rising jet fuel costs, many airlines are doing this to stay competitive with their pricing. To protect your health, avoid passengers who are obviously ill and coughing by asking for a seat reassignment. Keep your hands washed and off your face and use a hand sanitizer between hand washings. Keep yourself well hydrated with water and juices before and during and after the flight. During the flight, consider using a saline nasal solution to keep your nasal passages moistened. Be sure to get all recommended vaccines for your travel destination, including a flu shot.