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Travel Healthy, Protect Yourself from Tuberculosis, other Airborne Illness

Simple steps to avoid health risk during travel

Salem, N.H. – May 30, 2007 – Increase in travel abroad has led Americans to prepare for any worse-case scenario. However, you could be exposed to health risks before your flight even leaves the ground.

According to Dr. Robert Wheeler, medical director for On Call International, a global travel and medical assistance provider, “People might come into contact with a variety of viruses, molds and bacteria throughout the day. Many of these can lead to a range of ailments, from the common cold, to minor skin infections, to more serious infections from pathogens such as the extensively drug-resistant tuberculosis (XDR TB) that has precipitated a recent international air travel health investigation.”

Wheeler continues, “When you think about the number of people you come into contact with when traveling, the risk of the spread of infectious disease is clear. However, most times you can avoid falling ill from airborne pathogens by engaging in simple, adequate and consistent hygiene.”

Dr. Wheeler suggests the following tips to consider for healthy travel, no matter who sits beside you on your next flight.

- Stick to the basics: soap and water. The best way to avoid being infected by an airborne or surface contact pathogen and becoming sick is by washing your hands several times a day for at least 15 to 20 seconds, under warm, running water. This will also help to limit the spread of bacteria and viruses to others. When soap and water is unavailable, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer is a reasonable substitute.
- Avoid spreading germs through coughs and sneezes by covering your mouth and using a tissue.

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- For enhanced resistance against upper respiratory problems, or to stop spread of germs if you are ill, use a N95 face mask, most recently brought to attention regarding the potential future influenza pandemic.
- Update your immunizations against childhood and local diseases you could encounter, especially with popular travel today to exotic or remote locations.
- Be sure to take enough medications on your trip and to keep all prescription drugs in their original containers.
- Consider purchasing a medical, personal and travel assistance membership that will provide you with 24-hour emergency services including worldwide legal assistance, emergency message transmission to your family, and an emergency medical evacuation benefit to cover you for the duration of your trip.

Editor note: *If you would like to speak with Dr. Robert Wheeler to learn more about preventative measures or safety issues in regard to tuberculosis and healthy travel, please contact Gina Gretchko at 216.603.1978 or ggretchko@oncallinternational.com.*

On Call International is a leading provider of customized medical, security and travel assistance for international business and leisure travelers as well as expatriates, students and others away from home. Operating 24/7/365, On Call International specializes in emergency evacuations from any point on the globe, assisting more than seven million travelers. The U.S.-owned and trained assistance company serves the travel, insurance and maritime industries. On Call is a member and the U.S. representative of the 26-partner International Assistance Group, a global network of independent assistance companies. For more information, visit www.oncallinternational.com.

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