

Travelling overseas to visit family and friends

How to stay healthy

People going overseas to visit family or friends are at higher risk of serious infectious diseases which are rare in Australia, such as measles, diphtheria, polio, typhoid, malaria, dengue, and severe gastroenteritis infections.

The risk of getting these diseases is higher if you are travelling to less developed countries, especially areas that have poor access to clean drinking water and sanitation, or insects and animals that carry infections. This includes parts of East and Southeast Asia (e.g. India, Pakistan, or Bangladesh), Africa, the Caribbean, and Central and South America.

If you have friends and relatives visiting from overseas you may also be at risk of being exposed to some of these diseases if your visitors are sick when they arrive or become sick soon after.

Many of these diseases can be prevented through good hygiene, vaccination and special medicines.

What is the risk ?

Anyone who visits overseas is at increased risk of infection, even if staying with family and friends.

There are a many infectious diseases that are common overseas, such as those spread by:

- eating or drinking contaminated food or water (including typhoid, paratyphoid, shigella, salmonella, hepatitis A)
- mosquitoes (including malaria, dengue, Japanese Encephalitis virus)
- people (including Covid-19, flu, measles, diphtheria, polio, sexually transmitted infections and monkeypox)
- animals (including rabies)

You may be exposed to these infections even if the people you are staying with are well (they may have immunity to these diseases from earlier exposure).

Symptoms can occur a few days or a few weeks after being exposed.

If you develop symptoms after returning from overseas, then avoid contact with other people and contact your doctor. Call before you go to the doctor and let staff know about your symptoms and inform them you've been overseas.

What can I do before I leave Australia?

If you are going to countries which have poor access to clean drinking water and sanitation, contact your doctor or pharmacist for advice on how to stay healthy. This is particularly important if you are staying outside the main tourist areas, such as with family or friends.

Some diseases can be prevented by vaccination, and malaria can be prevented by special medicines.

The doctor or pharmacist can advise you if you or your children should have any vaccinations or medicines.

What can I do while travelling overseas?

- Be careful with water – drink bottled or boiled water and avoid ice in drinks. Avoid swimming in waterways or lakes, which can cause illness if swallowed or can infect cuts.
- Think about what you're eating – always keep food safe and hot. Do not eat food prepared by anyone who is sick or recently sick. Only eat food that is served piping hot, or that you peel or cook yourself. Avoid raw vegetables, shellfish and uncooked food. Avoid 'street food' which may not have been stored safely.
- Always wash your hands with soap and clean water before eating, drinking or preparing food.
- Avoid people who are showing symptoms of infectious diseases including fever, cough, rash or gastro. People may remain infectious for a few days after their symptoms have cleared.

I've just returned from overseas and I'm feeling sick, what should I do?

Talk to a doctor especially if you have a fever, rash or gastro symptoms. Tell them you have been overseas and where you have been. They may decide to test for specific illnesses, depending on where you have travelled.

Avoid contact with family and friends while you are sick, do not prepare, serve or share food with vulnerable people, especially people more at risk of illness such as young children, the elderly and people with weakened immune systems.

Stay home until you no longer have any symptoms.

If you have experienced gastro, wait at least two days after you recover to prepare food for people or returning to work where there may be vulnerable people.

I've just returned from overseas. What should I do?

If you have been exposed to these diseases, you might not feel sick straight away when you return home. It may take a few weeks for symptoms to show. Be alert to early signs of symptoms

Always wash your hands with soap and water after going to toilet and before preparing food.

For the first few weeks you are back, take extra care with hygiene, especially if you are around vulnerable people including young children.

For more information on related diseases and symptoms

- [Hepatitis A](#)
- [Hepatitis E](#)
- [Salmonellosis](#)
- [Shigellosis](#)
- [Typhoid and Paratyphoid \(Enteric Fever\)](#)
- [Viral Gastroenteritis](#)
- [Giardiasis](#)
- [Cholera](#)
- [Measles](#)
- [Diphtheria](#)
- [Polio](#)