

# NEWS RELEASE



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For immediate use


## TRAVELLING AT XMAS? ESSENTIAL HEALTH CHECKLIST

With Christmas holidays only nine weeks away it is important for travellers to be 100 percent prepared before leaving. Dr Deborah Mills, Australia's foremost travel medicine specialist, says she has noticed over the last 20 years, that travellers are heading off with less planning. Some travellers only have about a weeks notice. The GFC has made last minute airfares to some destinations very cheap. Even if you only *might* go this Xmas – think about getting these health jobs done now before the Christmas rush, just in case.

- 1. First aid course – have you done one ? is it current?.** Knowledge of a basic first aid may help you save someone's life, and most commonly this is a friend or loved one. Undertaking a first aid course makes sense for all travellers, but especially so if you are planning a trip to places with poor medical care. Update your course every two years. Courses are run by organisations such as Red Cross, the Ambulance service or Surf Life Saving Clubs. A first aid course makes a great Christmas present for someone too.
- 2. Dental check ..Have you had one in last 12 months?.** It is best visit the dentist well before departure, so there is time for necessary dental work to be done. Your dentist may suggest X-rays if you will be away for more than six months, this will detect problems in the early stages. A loose filling may cause considerable pain if you fly in an unpressurised aircraft or go scuba diving. You need to avoid air travel for three days after extensive dental work. A dental check-up before departure is especially important if you are likely to be visiting countries where dental services are poor. ( Dental kits are now commercially available for remote travellers who need emergency replacement of a filling)
  - **Container for your toothbrush!** While you are away avoid placing your toothbrush on bathroom counters or unclean surfaces.
- 3. Medical check?** Make sure your routine medical care is up-to-date. If you are away more than six months or visiting places with poor medical services, you may require a more in depth medical review including screening blood tests. It may also be useful to know your blood group and that of your fellow travellers.
  - **Carry written details of important medical history.** Carry a letter from your doctor outlining details of any medical condition you have and the usual treatment such as the drug and dosage. Take adequate supplies of your usual medications.
  - **Heart check?** If you will be exerting yourself more than usual, you may need a heart check before departure. Trekkers over 40 years of age may need an exercise cardiograph (ECG), this will test the heart's performance during exercise. If you are going scuba diving for the first time, ensure you have a medical clearance from a doctor experienced in dive medicine before you leave home.
  - **Women travellers.** Women should ensure smear tests/mammograms etc are up to date, and they have adequate supplies of the contraceptive pill. If travelling for long periods of time, Implanon has been popular with some ladies. It is a contraceptive implant placed in the upper arm and is effective for three years. It needs to be inserted some months before the trip, in case of side effects.
- 4. Do you need vaccines?..** Vaccines may take a month to take effect. Also it is better to give time for side effects to subside. Sometimes you need to test pills before you go. Some vaccines like rabies are cheaper if you have them early. Many vaccines last for life, so if you are likely to go but not sure exactly when, it may be worth getting the basic vaccines up to date now.
- 5. Research travel insurance. (30% of travellers fail to take travel insurance which can leave them stranded as well as sick)** It is strongly recommended all travellers take out travel insurance to cover medical evacuation and illness overseas. A 24-hour phone number for emergencies is useful. If you have existing medical conditions (e.g. asthma), if you are pregnant, or if you are planning activities like skiing, scuba diving, motorbike riding, hang gliding etc, read the policy carefully to see whether you are covered before buying the insurance. Those going to live or work in developing countries need long-term health insurance, which covers more than just emergency medical care. You may want to checkout the online travel insurance sites to get the cheapest price, but make sure you buy from a reputable supplier. If you travel a few times a year, it may be cheaper to have a yearly policy

As a pioneer within the travel medicine field, Dr Deborah Mills of Dr Deb – The Travel Doctor, has practiced in the area of travel medicine for 20 years. She is also the author of Australia's most popular medical travel book 'Travelling Well' which is in its fifteenth edition, with over 140,000 copies in print.

For more great travel information and resources, visit [www.drdeb.com.au](http://www.drdeb.com.au).

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