



KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Heading off on holiday this summer? Here's the knowledge you need to keep your family safe and healthy. By **Kate Farr**



Dr. Gerald Wong

Summertime sees the annual exodus of families from Hong Kong. The city's well-travelled broods head to all four corners of the globe to see relatives, sit in the sun and escape the city's humidity. But holiday preparedness is more than packing enough pool toys - you need to keep the fam healthy while you travel, too. We chat to two experts about what we need to consider before hitting the road.

When asked what parents should be aware of before booking their summer trip, General Practitioner **Dr. Gerald Wong** from Dr Lauren Bramley & Partners advises the need for research, particularly when travelling with young babies. "Choose your destination carefully. Isolated areas may not be appropriate for young children, and bear in mind that anti-malarials can't be given to babies weighing under five kilograms."

GET YOUR JABS

He also recommends scheduling in any jabs well in advance of your travel. "See your GP at least six weeks before departure to check that your children are up to date with their routine vaccinations, and discuss any additional travel vaccines. Some vaccines, such as rabies, need to be given over three to four weeks." Providing your GP with a detailed itinerary of your trip, be it a beach break, hiking trek or safari adventure, will help them to identify the most appropriate vaccines for your family's travels. Dr. Wong also recommends the Department of Health's Travel Health Service (travelhealth.gov.hk) as a good resource.

AVOID BUGS

So you're all vaccinated and on your way, but there's nothing worse than having your holiday ruined by an easily preventable illness, such as the dreaded ear infection, usually from hours spent in the pool or sea. "Ear infections can be prevented by drying the ears after swimming. Dab with tissues and avoid cotton buds. Avoid gastroenteritis with frequent hand washing, or use an alcohol hand rub. Drink bottled water and watch what your kids eat; your motto should be "boil it, cook it, peel it, or forget it!" adds Dr. Wong.

WORST CASE SCENARIO

In the worst-case scenario of an overseas emergency, Dr Wong stresses the importance of seeking immediate medical attention. "Even if there is a language barrier, a doctor can assess vital signs and stabilise a child in an emergency. Wherever possible, try to bring someone from your hotel or a tour guide in order to translate." Whether you opt for immediate treatment or an emergency evacuation home will depend on your insurance policy and severity of the illness. However, if in doubt, "Try to seek advice from your own GP if you're unsure whether the advised treatment plan advised is appropriate."



GET KITTED OUT

A first-aid kit is invaluable for dealing with simple injuries and illnesses when travelling. Dr. Wong recommends packing the following essentials:

- Fever or pain medicine, e.g. paracetamol
- Antihistamine such as Zyrtec to relieve itching from bites or allergies
- Antibiotic ointment for bites or minor cuts
- Rehydration salts, in case of diarrhoea



INSURANCE NEED TO KNOW

Family travel blogger **Nicola Burke** of Jetlag and Mayhem (jetlagandmayhem.com) puts finding good quality family cover right at the top of her list prior to any trip, "For me, the most important part of a travel insurance policy is its medical coverage. Evacuation costs are exorbitant and you want to be covered for every scenario, no matter how unlikely." Happily, this needn't be an expensive process. "Start by checking your existing health insurance coverage, but also check plans that come as standard with some credit cards. In some cases, you may not need extra travel insurance, but if you're not fully covered for medical expenses,

don't risk it." She adds, "If you travel frequently, buy an annual policy. The cost is marginal compared to what you could be spending out of pocket if something went wrong."

Nicola also advises carefully checking the fine print. "Make sure that you're covered for your destination. For example, many insurers don't cover US medical costs as standard, so you may need to supplement your cover. Check how reimbursement works in the event of a claim; do you need to pay up front for a hospital stay and then claim repayment, or does your travel insurer settle bills directly?"

Happily, although Nicola's family have used their insurance coverage when travelling, their experiences of medical claims have been relatively uneventful; "We've frequented a few foreign hospitals for ailments ranging from tonsillitis to a sprained ankle. Nothing too serious, but my husband's tonsillitis required an overnight hospital stay in Koh Samui which was expensive! Fortunately, our insurer settled with the hospital directly and it was all fairly straightforward."

So, with just a little preparation, your trip should be no more stressful than figuring out which flavour of ice cream to pick once you finally hit the pool. Bon voyage!



Nicola Burke

