

Health Care

Planning a vacation? Visit the Travel Health Clinic first

This is the time of year when people frequently start thinking about planning a winter vacation. Thoughts often begin to focus on warm and sunny climates, sandy beaches and the freedom from winter coats, mittens and hats. Travelling can bring the excitement of exploring a new culture and environment. However, you should be aware that conditions in other countries may be significantly different from those in Canada.

With travel to many foreign countries, including those to the sunny Caribbean waters, there can be a variety of health risks associated with food, water and even insects. All travellers are advised to investigate and obtain health counseling to ensure that they are well prepared from a health perspective for their particular journey.

The field of travel health has grown dramatically as greater numbers of people travel to exotic and remote locations. Approximately 600 million people cross international borders annually, however, only 8 per cent seek pre-travel health advice. Travel health advice focuses on providing a person with information about safe food and water consumption, and prevention methods for certain illnesses which can include immunizations and medications recommended or required for travel.

The Halton Region Health Department offers a comprehensive travel health consultation and immunization program to ensure that a person is informed of health risks associated with travel. The program also provides counselling and immunizations to reduce and prevent the likelihood of becoming ill while away and to have a safe return home. A thorough health history is taken and focuses on the person's health, current medications, previous immunizations, itinerary and travel characteristics for the upcoming trip. Based on the assessment, additional immunizations and medications may be recommended.

It is recommended that anyone planning to travel internationally book an appointment at a travel health clinic so that the appointment falls at least eight weeks before travel. This is to ensure that there is adequate time to receive vaccines and start any recommended medications. Travel health is not covered through the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) and therefore fees are associated with this service.

Some general advice for travellers includes:

- Ensure that your routine immunizations (diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, polio, measles, mumps and rubella) are up to date. Immunizations to prevent hepatitis A and typhoid are often recommended for

travellers where sanitary conditions are poor.

- If you are travelling to an area where malaria is present, be sure to take your antimalarial medication regularly and apply mosquito repellent containing 20-30% DEET to exposed skin.

- Use a condom to prevent sexually transmitted diseases such as gonorrhoea, syphilis, hepatitis B and AIDS.

- When travelling to warmer locations, use sun block regularly and re-apply after swimming.

- To help prevent travellers' diarrhea, drink purified water or commercially bottled beverages. Remember, contaminated water makes contaminated ice and can still cause illness.

- Do not eat uncooked fish or shellfish as it may have come from contaminated waters.

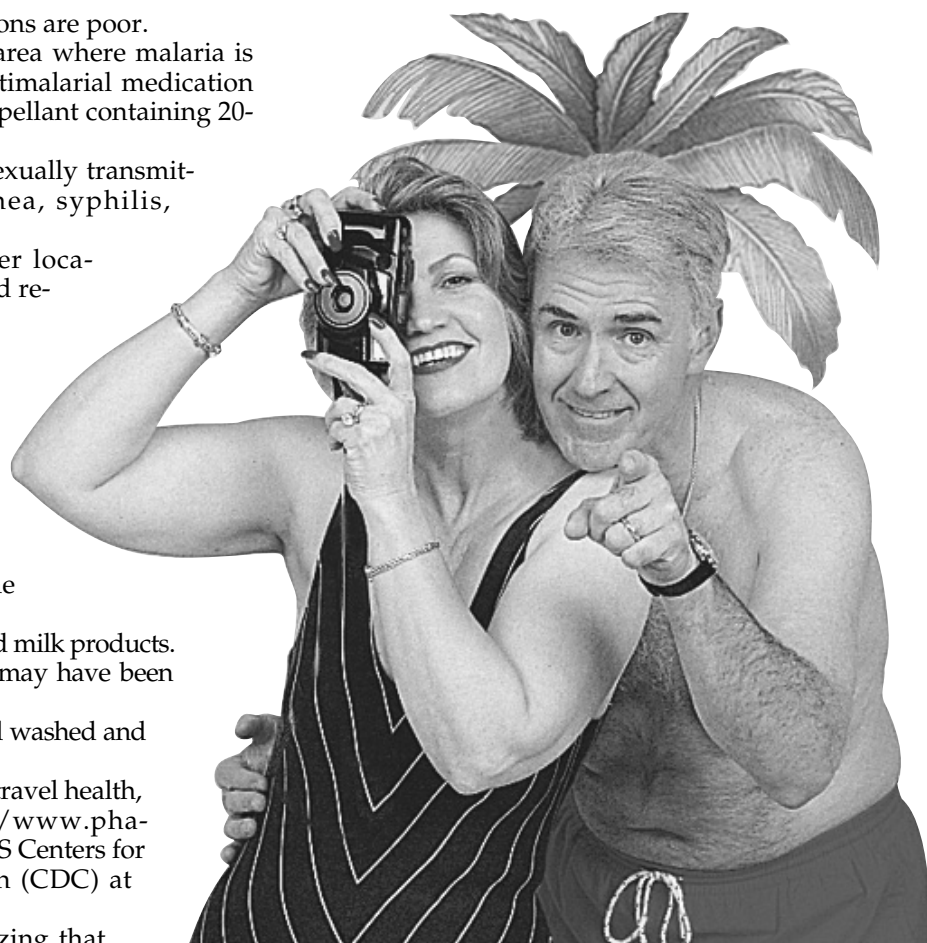
- Avoid unpasteurized milk and milk products.
- Avoid eating salads as they may have been washed with contaminated water.

Only eat fruit that has been well washed and peeled.

- For more information about travel health, visit Health Canada at <http://www.phacspc.gc.ca/tmp-pmv/> and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/>.

Planning ahead, and recognizing that travel to other countries may affect your health, can make all the difference between an enjoyable time away and an unpleasant experience.

For appointments and information about travel health services, please contact the Halton Region Health Department, 1-866-4HALTON (1-866-442-



5866), TTY 905-827-9833, or visit our website at www.region.halton.on.ca/health.

Health Notes is prepared by staff of the Halton Region Health Department

Health Notes

Why not make a New Year's Resolution and make a difference in a lonely senior's life? VON needs caring men and women to visit seniors in the community, for as little as an hour a week. Volunteers are matched on a one to one basis. For details call 1-800-387-7127, ext. 2317.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Halton is in need of volunteers. There are 74 children waiting for Big Brothers and Big Sisters. Do you have just a few hours each week to give to a child who needs a friend and mentor? There are also 50 students waiting for an In-School Mentor. Do you have one hour each week to visit a student at the child's school during the school year? If either of these possibilities interest you, contact 905-339-2355 for more information.

BECOME A VOLUNTEER

Literacy North Halton is currently recruiting for volunteer tutors, board members and general volunteers. For an application/info call 905-873-2200.

St. John Ambulance needs volunteers. The St. John group is a non-profit organization providing first aid services and therapy dog visitations in the north Halton area. The board, which meets once a month, assists with operational administration, public awareness and fund-raising. Info: Earl, 905-877-7658.

To advertise in this bi-weekly feature please contact Aaron at 905-873-0301 or aehjasson@independentfreepress.com

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