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Traveler's Tips and First Aid Kit

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Taking a trip? Whether you drive across the country, cruise the ocean, or fly overseas, the American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP) wishes you a safe and healthy trip, and recommends that you prepare a Traveler's First Aid Kit to help you respond to common medical emergencies. Emergency physicians also recommend that you take a first aid class, learn CPR, and always seek immediate medical attention when you need it.

Before any foreign travel, always check with your physician and travel clinic or public health department about any immunizations and medical documentation you will need specific to the area you are traveling.

For the kit itself, use a tote bag because it can hold all the items you need and is easy to carry. Never store it in luggage – put it in your carry-on bag, and always keep it with you.

Before you leave:

Visit your physician. Ask for a medical summary listing of any medical problems, operations, allergies, as well as a copy of your most recent EKG. Have any TB skin test results recorded by your physician. If you wear corrective lenses, take an extra pair on your trip, and carry your lens prescription with you. Make a list of any medications you are taking, using both generic and brand names, and be sure to pack enough medication for your trip (at least 50% more than you think you might need). Check your medical insurance policy and health plan for coverage of illness or accidents outside the United States, as well as how to get medical attention and return home if you become ill. If you are traveling on board a cruise ship, ask what medical staff and equipment are available in case of an emergency.

ACEP suggests the following items for a Traveler's First Aid Kit. Include other items as recommended by your physician.

Kit Contents:

- Acetaminophen, Ibuprofen, and Aspirin tablets: to relieve headache, pain, fever, and simple sprains or strains of the body. Have at least two aspirin tablets available at all times in case of heart attack, although use as recommended by your physician. Use appropriate dosages, and make sure the medicine is age appropriate. (Aspirin should not be used to relieve flu symptoms or be given to children).
- Antihistamine: to relieve allergies and inflammation. Use appropriate dosages, and make sure the medicine is age appropriate.
- Anti-nausea/motion sickness medication.
- Bandages of assorted sizes to cover minor cuts and scrapes.
- Bandages closures (one-fourth and one-inch sizes) to tape edges of minor cuts together.

- Triangular bandage; to wrap injuries and make an arm sling.
- Elastic wraps to wrap wrist, ankle, knee, and elbow injuries.
- Gauze in rolls and two-inch and four-inch pads to dress larger cuts and scrapes.
- Adhesive tape; to keep gauze in place.
- Sharp scissors with rounded tips; to cut tape, gauze, or clothes.
- Safety pins to fasten splints and bandages.
- Antiseptic wipes; to disinfect wounds or clean hands, tweezers, and thermometer.
- Antibiotic ointment to prevent infection in burns, cuts, and scrapes.
- Hydrogen peroxide; to disinfect and clean wounds.
- Disposable, instant-activating cold packs for cooling injuries and burns.
- Tweezers; to remove small splinters, foreign objects, bee stingers, and ticks from the skin (see first aid manual for proper removal of ticks).
- Rubber gloves to protect hands and reduce risk of infection when treating open wounds.
- Thermometer with case; to take temperatures.
- Calamine lotion; to relieve itching and irritation from insect bites and stings and poison ivy.
- Hydrocortisone cream; to relieve irritation from rashes.
- Sunscreen; SPF 15 or higher, broad-spectrum.
- Insect repellent; repellents appropriate for use on children. Use as directed.
- Change for pay phone.

Remember to follow the same precaution for medicines in your Traveler's First Aid Kit as with any medicine. Use as recommended by your physician, and make sure children cannot get them. Always use child safety caps. Check expiration dates, and throw away any expired medicines. If someone in your household has a life-threatening allergy, carry appropriate medication with you at all times.

Avoid Travelers' Diarrhea:

Dos:

- Wash your hands frequently and always before eating.
- Eat items that require little handling in preparation.
- Eat only well-cooked and hot foods. If eating at a buffet, eat early before foods cool, or insects arrive.
- Eat only fresh fruits and vegetables you have peeled or seen prepared in front of you.
- Drink hot beverages, such as coffee or tea.
- Drink bottled water or name brand carbonated beverages.
- Wipe off any bottle before drinking or pouring.
- Tie a colored ribbon around the bathroom faucet as a reminder not to drink the tap water.

Don'ts:

- Never drink tap water. Don't brush your teeth with tap water.
- Never drink fresh water or standing water.
- Avoid bottled water not opened in front of you.
- Avoid ice cubes. If you must have a cool drink, place ice cubes in a small, clean leak-proof bag and place the bag in your drink. Carry bags with you.
- Avoid food from street vendors.
- Avoid shellfish, any uncooked seafood, or raw meat.
- Avoid uncooked vegetables.
- Avoid salads.

- Avoid dairy products.
- Avoid juices not prepared in front of you. Tap water may have been added.
- Minimize swimming and swallowing water unless well chlorinated.

For more health and safety tips, visit ACEP's web site at www.acep.org.

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