

FALL 2010

# Healthy Travels

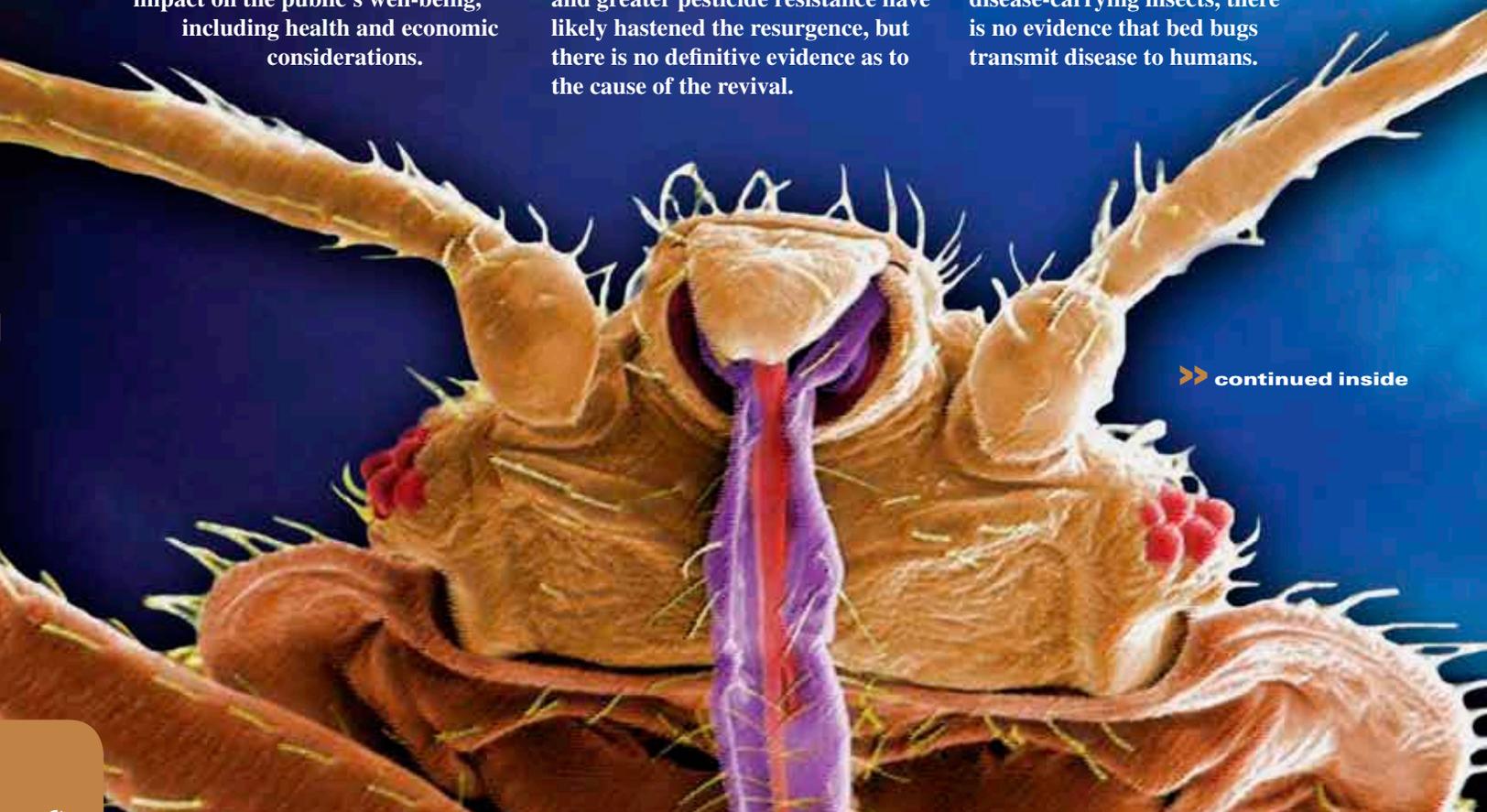
## Bed Bugs Bite Back: Preventing an Unwelcome Traveler

Bed bugs, once nearly eradicated from the developed world, are making a strong comeback on the pest scene. The National Pest Management Association (NPMA) has seen reports of bed bugs increase dramatically in the past several years. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), bed bugs can have significant impact on the public's well-being, including health and economic considerations.

The insect, *Cimex lectularius*, is reddish-brown in color, relatively small (4-5 mm), and feeds on animal blood (including humans). Bed bugs get their name for their tendency to appear in and around households and sleeping areas as well as their propensity to feed at night. Restricted use of pesticides (such as DDT), increased international travel, and greater pesticide resistance have likely hastened the resurgence, but there is no definitive evidence as to the cause of the revival.

Although not all bites have visible signs, bed bug bites can cause skin irritation and itching. Treatment with topical corticosteroids and washing with hot water may help relieve symptoms of bites. Anxiety can also result from excessive worry, so maintaining an appropriate level of concern is important. Fortunately, although bed bugs resemble other disease-carrying insects, there is no evidence that bed bugs transmit disease to humans.

»» continued inside



Inside



Bed Bugs Bite Back: Preventing an Unwelcome Traveler continued > Traffic and Automobile Safety  
The Elderly Traveler > Traveler's Insurance > Jet Lag > Personal Safety and Security in Travel

## Traffic and Automobile Safety

Whether it is for business or pleasure, local or foreign, traveling is often exciting, especially if you are visiting a new country. Even with a meticulously designed trip, an often overlooked piece of travel planning is travel safety, specifically road and vehicular safety. Rarely do people stop and consider if the taxi/bus driver is properly trained to drive safely, or if people are up to the task of operating and navigating an unfamiliar vehicle in a new location.

Annually, over 1.2 million people die in road traffic accidents worldwide. An additional 50 million people are injured or disabled by road traffic crashes each year. Auto collisions are the leading cause of death among people ages 15-29 and the second leading cause of death among people ages 5-14. Over 90% of road fatalities occur in low and middle-

income countries. In travelers, African and Asian countries have some of the highest road traffic death and injury rates in the world.

Not all road accidents can be avoided, but a higher level of awareness and practicing simple tips can greatly reduce your risk of being in an accident, at home or abroad.

- » Familiarize yourself with the local driving laws before you arrive
- » Familiarize yourself with neighborhoods or areas that are not safe for tourists
- » If taking a taxi, learn how to say “drive safely” or “safety first” in the local language
- » Avoid vehicles or taxis that appear unsafe or appear to have been in many accidents

- » If you plan on driving abroad, ensure the host country recognizes your driver’s license. Otherwise, obtain an International Driving Permit (IDP)
- » Ensure 100% of the passengers utilize seatbelts, regardless of the local ‘custom’
- » Avoid speeding and ensure plenty of travel time in your itinerary to avoid rushing
- » Plan your driving route before you leave. Have a good country specific road map or GPS
- » Don’t drive at night or in bad weather
- » Avoid distractions such as cell phones, texting, or reading a map

## The Elderly Traveler

With kids moved out, obligations settled, and retirements firmly established, many seniors are finding their golden years to be an excellent time to travel. Like any other population, the elderly have special factors that need to be taken into consideration, and proper planning and preparation can help minimize travel-related risks, ensuring a safe and healthy trip.

Pre-travel preparations are essential to any traveler desiring a good travel experience. Elderly travelers, and especially those with special medical needs or considerations, are no exception. When considering different travel destinations, it is important to make an honest assessment of your current condition and the demands of different locales, often in consultation with a healthcare provider familiar with your condition and medical issues. Those patients with cardiovascular or pulmonary conditions may not be able to tolerate a rapid change of altitude, and a period of adjustment may be necessary

for many activities. Remote locations may not have advanced medical facilities available, and may require additional planning and preparation. Traveler’s health insurance should be obtained, and should include air ambulance or medical evacuation coverage if such services are not reliable in your planned destination. Many locations offer organized tours that take the unique needs of senior travelers into account, but others may require the traveler to make all arrangements themselves. Be sure to discuss any special needs with tour organizers, be upfront, frank, and honest about any disabilities, so that organizers may make the proper preparations. Airlines may also need advance notice to accommodate special medical needs.

Have an adequate supply of prescription and over the counter medications in appropriate labeled, pharmacy-issued containers, and make sure to carry at least a portion of this medication with you in your carry-on luggage, in case bags are lost or misdirected. Obtain

written copies of all prescriptions, including the generic name of the medication, as a given brand name may not be available in all areas. Have an adequate supply of disposable syringes, and a doctor’s note for customs, if you require injections. Medications containing controlled substances, such as narcotic painkillers, should also have a doctor’s note to avoid misunderstandings. Keep medical alert cards or bracelets up to date and legible, and ensure a travel companion or friend is aware of any medical issues. A wallet card containing your current medications and doses, and contact information of a medical provider familiar with any health issues, can be very helpful in a medical emergency. Your full medical record should be readily available, through a contact person or clearly designated healthcare provider. Pack an extra set of glasses and/or hearing aid batteries and specialized equipment to maintain such devices as wheelchairs.

## Traveler's Insurance

With the recent oil spill in the gulf, airline strikes, hurricane threats, and volcanic ash clouds interrupting travel, it's no wonder that more people are looking into traveler's insurance. Which makes us wonder, is travel insurance worth buying? Some travelers choose not to insure their vacation, having taken many trips without major problems, or having had insurance, only to find out they weren't covered due to an unknown exclusion clause. Still, others are relieved to get reimbursed for big vacation budgets when they fell ill, or experience some other unexpected hardship.

Everyone has a different tolerance to risk, and depending on your individual circumstances, competing insurers offering expanded coverage or decreased costs may help make it easier to decide whether to buy trip insurance.

There are a myriad of traveler's insurance plans that cover everything from emergency medical care and evacuation to losing out on a tee time at the local golf resort. Other benefits of travel insurance include coverage for trip cancellation due to work obligations or illness, identity theft while abroad,

lost, stolen or delayed luggage, airline strikes, hurricanes, or even a 'cancel for any reason' option. Some companies have even expanded their coverage to expensive vacation packages, covering up to \$100,000. Others still have expanded to reimburse unused sports or concert tickets, and refunds for prepaid golf fees due to canceled rounds from bad weather.

In order to determine which plan is right for you, think about your priorities on the trip. Do you want to ensure reimbursement for trip cancellation for any reason or are you looking only for international health insurance and evacuation? Other things to think about are trip interruptions, delays, and bad weather coverage. However, read the fine print. Some new policies will not cover ash disruption for trip cancellations.

The next step is to compare policies and prices. Prices can vary based on the traveler's age, vacation site, and the length and cost of the trip. It's not unusual for costs to vary over 300%, so it's important to shop around. Websites such as InsureMyTrip and QuoteWright enable the consumer to compare prices

directly. Another important tip is to understand policy limitations where certain situations aren't covered. In that case, consider purchasing the 'cancel for any reason' option.

Finally, make sure you know your existing insurance policy for medical, automobile, tour group, or homeowner/renter policies. Some policies already reimburse for medical emergencies or lost and stolen items when traveling. If you decide to purchase travel insurance, make sure you do so early, since coverage for pre-existing medical conditions may either increase premiums or not be covered at all. Here are some interesting quotes from NPR on travel insurance:

"The only way to fully protect yourself is to buy a package holiday."

"If you took out a policy and a similar thing happened, we would look at it again. The policy was not actually covering you. It was just, in that instance, we decided we would pay."

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## Jet Lag

In today's era, people have many reasons to travel long distances. For most people, business or family provides the main reason for travel. Some may travel long distances in a short amount of time. As a traveler you may experience jet lag, or desynchronization. This is a condition in which you cross multiple time zones in an easterly or westerly direction, changing the times that your body is exposed to sunlight and darkness. Interestingly, jet lag only occurs after travel in an east to west direction or a west to east direction and does not occur when a traveler travels in a northerly or southerly direction. The severity of jet lag you may experience worsens when you cross a larger number of time zones.

As a traveler, your body's biological rhythm becomes disrupted. This disruption may lead to a multitude of uncontrollable symptoms. Common problems related to jet lag include sleep disturbance, headaches, and daytime fatigue. Other jet lag symptoms include disorientation, irritability, constipation, or diarrhea. Some travelers have experienced mild depression as a result of jet lag. Other travelers experiencing nausea and ear aches may associate their symptoms with jet lag, but may be experiencing symptoms associated with the mode of transportation (unusual motion or pressure gradients).

If you anticipate crossing multiple time zones in your upcoming travels there are several preventive measures you can take to minimize or avoid experiencing the symptoms of jet lag:

- » Stay hydrated before, during, and after traveling. Drinking plenty of water will help offset the effects of being in a dry airplane cabin.
- » Moderate your exposure to bright light. Sunlight is one of the most important factors your body uses to adjust its internal clock, if traveling east, limit exposure to sunlight to the morning hours. If traveling west, limit exposure to sunlight to the afternoon hours.
- » Rest before departure. By obtaining adequate rest prior to your departure you afford your body the ability to effectively respond to the stressful situation of adjusting to a different time zone.
- » Sleep on overnight flights. On overnight flights traveling east, try to sleep during the flight. Ear plugs and an eye mask may reduce the amount of physical disturbances in a flight, allowing you to get some sleep. Even a small amount of sleep may help to avoid jet lag. Also, try not to nap upon arrival at your destination. Instead, wait until the appropriate time to go to sleep at your destination.
- » Adjust your schedule prior to departure. If possible, adjust your normal sleep and wake times to more closely resemble that of your destination. Also, consider eating meals nearer the times that you will be eating at your destination.
- » Arrive early. By arriving early, you allow extra time for your body to adjust to the new time and environment.

If you find that your problems persist or consistently affect your ability to complete your responsibilities effectively, you should see your medical provider for further assistance and treatment.

## Bed Bugs

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Prevention remains the best way to control bed bugs. Bed bugs are commonly spread on clothing or luggage, so care should be taken when traveling to avoid them (see below). Resolving existing infestations requires an integrated pest management process to include a registered experienced pest control company, treatment with pesticides or heat, and home control measures.

Here are some common-sense practices to help prevent an unwelcome return traveler:

- 1) Before you travel
  - a. Inquire with the hotel about problems and consider using luggage liners
  - b. Check the national registry at [www.bedbugregistry.com](http://www.bedbugregistry.com)
- 2) While traveling
  - a. Inspect room and mattress for signs of bugs (black spots, dried blood, or actual bugs)
  - b. Close bags and suitcases and elevate to keep them off the floor
- 3) Upon return home
  - a. Wash all clothes in hot water, regardless if you wore them
  - b. Check luggage for any signs of bugs and vacuum luggage if concerned
  - c. Check and seal cracks and crevices in your home (deny the bugs hiding places)
- 4) Don't panic!

Bed bugs are a growing concern for travelers, but it is important to remember that they are relatively harmless and infestations can be reasonably prevented. Take appropriate precautions, but don't let worrying about extra guests ruin your trip!

## Personal Safety and Security in Travel

Regardless of one's mode of travel or destination, the potential for danger always exists. Unfortunately, crime occurs worldwide and personal awareness of surroundings can prevent a traveler from becoming an unwilling victim. Prior to your departure, you should familiarize yourself with your destination. The website of the Bureau of Consular Affairs at the U.S. Department of State (<http://travel.state.gov>) provides useful information for travelers, including warnings against travel to certain countries, public announcements regarding terrorist threats or risks to the security of American travelers, and consular information sheets. Material provided on these sheets includes the location of the U.S. Embassy or Consulate in the specified country, unusual immigration practices, health conditions, minor political disturbances, unusual currency and entry regulations, crime and security information, and drug penalties. This provides an invaluable reference source when planning international travel.

Before you leave home, copy your passport photo page, vaccination certificate, traveler's check receipts, air ticket, and driver's license. Leave a copy at home and carry a couple of copies in various places in your luggage. Make a list of important numbers such as credit card and ATM card numbers to include expiration dates, billing contact numbers, and numbers to call in case of loss as well as Traveler's check sequence numbers including amount, brand, and contact telephone numbers. If possible, scan these documents and keep in an encrypted computer file for reference.

Theft from hotel rooms, purse snatching, and pick pocketing are the most common crimes against tourists. You can limit theft from hotel rooms by carrying important papers with you in a money belt or using the hotel safe if available. Be especially alert near tourist attractions or wherever there are crowds. These areas attract petty criminals, pickpockets, and con artists, and looks

may be deceiving as pickpockets may be children or women with babies. Do not mention personal and travel details when conversing with strangers to avoid becoming a target.

Though automated teller machines (ATMs) provide a convenient source of replenishing a cash supply while on vacation, they can also make you a target. Always keep your ATM card in a safe place and remove it only when you intend to use it. Keep the PIN safe by memorizing it, and do not list it in any of your travel materials. Observe the site of the ATM prior to using it, and, if possible, take another trusted person with you when withdrawing money. Use particular caution at night, and avoid poorly lit or out of the way locations. Have your card out and ready to use rather than shuffling through a purse or wallet at the machine. Use your body to shield anyone's view of the screen or keys used to enter your pin, and always request a receipt if available. Upon completion of your transaction, do not examine the receipt and count your cash since this directly advertises that you have just made a withdrawal. Instead, review this later and call your bank if you note a problem with the transaction.

In short, vigilance is the key to avoiding safety concerns. Do not let your guard down because you are on vacation.

### General Safety Rules:

- » Do not flaunt your money or other valuables, i.e., do not wear fancy jewelry or other luxurious items while out sightseeing. This will attract petty thieves and pickpockets. You will be more secure if you leave your better jewelry at home.
- » Avoid sharing detailed information about yourself, where you are staying, or your itinerary.
- » Keep close account of your money, passport, and credit cards.
- » Stay in physical contact with your bags unless they are locked in your room or stowed safely (preferably in your view) on transport.
- » Every time you stand up, look back to see what you have left behind.
- » Carry your luggage onto the bus, train, truck, or taxi with you whenever possible.
- » Do not rent a room that is not secure; lock it every time you leave.
- » Ask the hotel desk if there are areas or neighborhoods near the hotel that you should avoid.
- » Avoid walking alone after dark. If you do not have companions to walk with, take a cab.
- » Avoid walking in isolated areas or neighborhoods that appear questionable.
- » Do not use shortcuts, narrow alleys, or poorly lit streets as this invites danger.
- » Make sure you leave a copy of your travel itinerary with a relative or friend.
- » If you take a cab, ensure that it is clearly marked as an official taxi.
- » Be aware of your surroundings. If you do not "feel" right, remove yourself and find a more secure location.
- » Don't do anything you think is possibly dangerous just to avoid being rude.



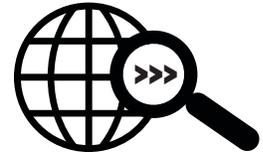
## Travel Medicine Clinic at Fort Myer



Are you planning on traveling internationally in the near future? If you are visiting a location in Africa, Asia, or Central/South America, an appointment at the travel medicine clinic can help you prepare for any disease risks you may encounter.

- The Family Health Center of Fort Myer (Rader Army Health Clinic) Travel Medicine Clinic is open on Tuesdays from 0900 to 1600.
- Appointments can be made by calling 703-696-3439.
- Schedule your appointment approximately 4-6 weeks prior to your departure date.
- Bring your medical records with you, including all prior vaccination records.

## Information Sources



Shoreland's Travel Health Online — [www.tripprep.com](http://www.tripprep.com)

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention

- Traveler's Health Website — [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel)
- Travel Notice Website — [www.cdc.gov/travel/notices.aspx](http://www.cdc.gov/travel/notices.aspx)

U.S. Department of State

- Travel & Business Website — [www.state.gov/travelandbusiness](http://www.state.gov/travelandbusiness)
- Embassy & Consulate Website — [usembassy.state.gov](http://usembassy.state.gov)

World Health Organization Travel Website — [www.who.int/topics/travel/en](http://www.who.int/topics/travel/en)

International Association for Medical Assistance to Travelers — [www.iamat.org](http://www.iamat.org)

International Society of Travel Medicine — [www.istm.org](http://www.istm.org)

American Society of Tropical Medicine & Hygiene — [www.astmh.org](http://www.astmh.org)

U.S. Army Public Health Command — <http://phc.amedd.army.mil>

*Tip: Check out these websites for more information about staying healthy while traveling abroad.*

## Fast Facts

- The vast majority of travel-related illnesses are preventable.
- You should visit the travel clinic 4-6 weeks before traveling to Africa, Asia, Central America, or South America.
- Vaccines are the safest, most effective means of preventing illness.
- Avoiding insect bites by using DEET-containing repellents is the only method of preventing some insect-borne diseases.
- One of the best ways to reduce the risk of illness while traveling is to wash your hands frequently.

## Healthy Travels

*Healthy Travels* is a quarterly publication written by the residents of the NCC-WRAIR General Preventive Medicine Residency. The assertions contained herein are the personal views of the authors and are not to be construed as official. Although every effort is made to ensure statements are consistent with U.S. Army and COCOM disease control policies, the reader is referred to the appropriate headquarters' preventive medicine officer for definitive guidance and policy statements regarding official travel medicine requirements. Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited. Questions, comments and letters should be addressed to: Division of Preventive Medicine (MCMR-UWK), Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, ATTN: Residency Director, Silver Spring, MD 20910-7500

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