

RGH Pharmacy E-Bulletin

Volume 25 (11): April 23, 2007

A joint initiative of the Patient Services Section and the Drug and Therapeutics Information Service of the Pharmacy Department, Repatriation General Hospital, Daw Park, South Australia. The RGH Pharmacy E-Bulletin is distributed in electronic format on a weekly basis, and aims to present concise, factual information on issues of current interest in therapeutics, drug safety and cost-effective use of medications.

Editor: Assoc. Prof. Chris Alderman, University of South Australia – Director of Pharmacy, RGH

© Pharmacy Department, Repatriation General Hospital, Daw Park, South Australia 5041

Pre-departure health advice for overseas travellers

Before travelling overseas, especially to certain areas, it is important to consider a number of health issues where medications or vaccinations may be required before travel commences. A few issues that may need to be considered depending on the destination and type of travel are listed below.

Motion sickness

Hyoscine hydrobromide and some of the sedating antihistamines (e.g. dimenhydrinate, pheniramine and promethazine) are used to prevent motion sickness. They are more effective if given before motion sickness develops. The first dose is usually given before travel commences (the time varies depending on the drug used). Hyoscine may be slightly more effective but it may not be as well tolerated compared with the sedating antihistamines due to its anticholinergic adverse effects.

DVT prophylaxis

This was covered previously in an RGH Pharmacy E-Bulletin. See “Deep vein thrombosis prophylaxis and long distance air travel”, Volume 18(3): May 16, 2005.

Vaccinations

Certain vaccinations before overseas travel may be needed to provide protection against infectious diseases that are endemic in some parts of the world. However, vaccination is only one of several strategies which travellers should adopt to protect their health while overseas and it is recommended that individuals travelling to tropical or developing countries seek current advice from a travel medicine specialist. It is important that standard vaccinations are up to date, especially tetanus. Depending on the destination other vaccinations may be required. Advice should be individualised according to the traveller, the destination and the duration and season of travel. For further information regarding vaccinations recommended for overseas travel, see the resources listed below.

Malaria

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends prophylaxis for people at high risk (e.g. pregnant women and non-immune people travelling to endemic areas). In general, prophylaxis should be commenced one week (preferably 2–3 weeks for mefloquine) before entering an endemic area to establish tolerance and to ensure therapeutic drug concentrations, and should be continued for four weeks after leaving the area. The drugs should be used in combination with personal protection (including mosquito nets where available) to avoid mosquito bites. The choice of antimalarial is individualised and is based on its efficacy against a particular type of malaria and the extent of drug resistance, the extent of exposure to mosquitoes, adverse effects of the drug, and certain patient characteristics. Current advice should be sought from a specialist centre and/or publication. See the resources listed below.

Resources

Detailed information regarding issues for overseas travel can be obtained from a number of resources including:

- Health Services Australia (all states and territories), telephone 1300 361 046
- Travellers' Medical and Vaccination Centre (TMVC) (all states and territories), telephone 1300 658 844
- Travel Clinics Australia, telephone 1300 369 359
- WHO, International Travel and Health Vaccination Requirements and Health Advice, www.who.int/ith/
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Health Information for International Travel, www.cdc.gov/travel/
- The Australian Immunisation Handbook 8th edition, <http://www9.health.gov.au/immhandbook/>

Acknowledgment – This E-Bulletin is based on work by Tania Colarco, Clinical Pharmacist, DATIS, RGH

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION – CONTACT THE PHARMACY DEPARTMENT ON 82751763 or email: chris.alderman@rgh.sa.gov.au
Information in this E-Bulletin is derived from critical analysis of available evidence – individual clinical circumstances should be considered when making treatment decisions. You are welcome to forward this E-bulletin by email to others you might feel would be interested, or to print the E-Bulletin for wider distribution. Reproduction of this material is permissible for purposes of individual study or research.