



# TRAVELLERS' DIARRHEA

Travellers' diarrhea is the most common illness that affects travellers. It is easily spread from person-to-person or by consuming contaminated food or water. Travellers' diarrhea is caused by many different bacteria (including *E. coli*, *Salmonella*, *Shigella* and *Campylobacter*), parasites (including *Giardia*, *Cryptosporidium*, *Cyclospora* and others) and viruses (such as norovirus and rotavirus).

## WHAT IS MY RISK?

Travellers are at higher risk when going to destinations with poor standards of hygiene and sanitation and/or eating at places with poor food handling practices.

Young children, the elderly, and people with existing health problems are more at risk.

## HOW IS IT TRANSMITTED?

Travellers' diarrhea is spread by eating food or drinking water that is contaminated or through person-to-person contact due to poor hygiene.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

- Symptoms depend on the bacteria, parasite or virus that has caused the illness.
- In addition to diarrhea, they usually include fever, nausea, vomiting, bloating, abdominal cramping and an urgent need to use the bathroom.
- Generally, the symptoms go away in a few days without treatment.
- In more severe and rare cases, travellers' diarrhea can lead to dehydration and death. This is a particular concern for children, the elderly and individuals with chronic diseases or weakened immune systems.
- If you have blood in your stool, you should seek medical attention, even if your other symptoms are not very severe.

## CAN TRAVELLERS' DIARRHEA BE TREATED?

Most symptoms clear up on their own after a few days.

The most important treatment is to maintain hydration:

- Drink lots of fluids. This is especially important for children, people with existing health problems and the elderly. In moderate to severe cases, use oral rehydration solutions.
- Remember to always use safe water (boiled, disinfected or from a commercially sealed bottle) to drink or to mix your oral hydration solutions.

In some cases, anti-motility medication may provide some relief of symptoms (frequent and urgent need to use the bathroom). This type of medication should not be taken if you have bloody diarrhea or a fever. It is important to carefully follow the directions on each medication as well as the advice of your health care provider.

Your health care provider may discuss the possibility of using antibiotics to treat moderate to severe diarrhea.



## WHERE IS TRAVELLERS' DIARRHEA A CONCERN?

- The risk of travellers' diarrhea occurs worldwide.
- High risk destinations include developing countries in Central and South America, Mexico, Africa, the Middle East and Asia.
- There is a moderate risk in Eastern Europe and some parts of the Caribbean.
- The risk is lower in Northern and Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, the United States and Canada.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Consult a health care provider or visit a travel health clinic preferably six weeks before you travel.

### 1. Practise safe food and water precautions

### 2. Wash your hands frequently

- Wash your hands with soap under warm running water for at least 20 seconds, as often as possible.

- Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available. It's a good idea to always keep some with you when you travel.

### 3. Carry oral rehydration solutions

### 4. Discuss prevention and treatment options of travellers' diarrhea with your healthcare provider before you travel

### 5. Monitor your health

- Seek medical attention if you have bloody diarrhea, high fever, persistent vomiting, severe abdominal pain, profuse sweating, or signs of dehydration. In some cases, diarrhea may be a sign of another infection (for example, malaria), so it is important to see a health care provider, discuss your symptoms and remember to tell them where you have been travelling or living.
- Seek medical attention immediately if your infant or young child develops signs of dehydration, bloody diarrhea, fever or persistent vomiting.

---

## RELATED LINKS

### Assistance—sickness or injury while travelling:

[www.travel.gc.ca/assistance/emergency-info/sick-injured](http://www.travel.gc.ca/assistance/emergency-info/sick-injured)

### Eat and drink safely:

[www.travel.gc.ca/travelling/health-safety/food-water](http://www.travel.gc.ca/travelling/health-safety/food-water)

### If you get sick after travelling:

[www.travel.gc.ca/returning/sick](http://www.travel.gc.ca/returning/sick)