

# Travel Medicine Briefcase

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## Travel Medicine and Migrant Health

*Abstracts of papers presented at the recent Symposium on Travel Medicine and Migrant Health held during the Second International Congress on Parasitology and Tropical Medicine, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 9-11 October 2001.*

### Travel Medicine and Migrant Health

**by Peter A Leggat—School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, James Cook University, Townsville, Queensland, Australia**

Travel medicine is that aspect of public health medicine which seeks to prevent illnesses and injuries occurring to travellers going abroad, manages problems arising in travellers coming back or coming from abroad, and is concerned about the impact of tourism on health. Classically, travel medicine involves the preparation of a variety of travellers, including business and tour package travellers, backpackers and hostellers, sports persons, and workers, who are going from developed countries to developing countries. This may include the provision of advice, prophylaxis and other items, such as traveller's medical kits, from a variety of sources, which will assist in preventing and managing a range of disease and injury hazards, but normally focusing on key diseases such as malaria, vaccine preventable diseases, diarrhoeal diseases and sexually transmitted infections. Migrants should also be included in this definition of travel medicine, as it is important that they are prepared for a longer-term stay in their new country. Migrants present in various ways and may include planned and unplanned immigrants. It is preferred that there is co-operation between the countries supplying and receiving the migrants, especially in the area of health protection, however this may not be the case with unplanned migrants, who are often quarantined for a period of time. Conditions, which these migrants bring with them into their country of arrival, must then be dealt with by treating health professionals specialising in migrant health.

### Impact of development on tropical diseases: the migrant factor in Malaysia

**by Anuar Zaini MZ and Khairul Anuar A—Faculty of Medicine, University of Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia**

All nation states, including Malaysia, deserves development and modernisation. On the one hand, modernisation brings tremendous achievements on social and economic well being, on the other hand, the process of it brings along the various untoward effects on the nation.

One of the main factors playing for the ill effect of modernisation seems to be the rapid changes in the demographic pattern. In the initial state of modernisation, mass migration of rural populations to the urban area (rapid urbanisation), has been witnessed in Malaysia since the seventies. In the early nineties, the robust economic development in Malaysia necessitated the import of foreign labour from the neighbouring countries in order to fill the cheap labour in the labour-intensive industries. This demographic evaluation, internal and foreign migration, parallels the economic progress of the host countries. According to the latest report from the Immigration Department, there are more than 1.2 million registered foreign workers in Malaysia. This figure may exceed 2 million, with the inclusion of illegal immigrants, and this is a big proportion (about 10%) of foreign workers in Malaysia, which has a population of 20 million. The presence of such a big number of foreign workers during less than a decade is not merely an immigration issue, but it is highly concerning for health care, housing and education. As the immigrant community is strictly under cover and highly dynamic, the emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases are a great concern for Malaysia, especially in the design of future policy.

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## Editorial..

The *Travel Medicine Briefcase* is a special regular supplement to the *ACTM Bulletin*. It is an Official Publication of the Faculty of Travel Medicine of the College and New Zealand Society of Travel Medicine (NZSTM). The Faculty of Travel Medicine is a special project of The Australasian College of Tropical Medicine to provide a professional organisation for tropical medicine in Australia and the region. Membership is growing quickly and all categories of professional membership require a high level of academic and professional qualifications and commitment to travel medicine. Now that membership of the Faculty is growing, it is now time to become involved in the further development of the Faculty and its activities—publications, scientific meetings, policy development, professional accreditation, and electronic networking, just to name a few. The Faculty is governed by a Faculty Board, presently appointed by the ACTM College Council.

I trust that you will enjoy this issue of the *Travel Medicine Briefcase*. It will continue to feature special articles and news on travel medicine from both the Faculty and the NZSTM. Your contributions and suggestions are most welcome via email.

**PETER A LEGGAT**  
**EDITOR—TRAVEL**  
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# Essential travel health advice for hostellers

## Introduction

There has been an increasing trend for people to travel internationally and further afield.<sup>1</sup> More than three million Australians travel overseas each year. Personal responsibility has become paramount, as fewer people are going on programmed package tours,<sup>1</sup> and advice on such issues as first aid and travel insurance may need to be emphasised for these more independent travellers. Individual travel through hostelling and backpacking appears to have become more popular as travellers seek more cost-effective means of travelling and accommodation.

## International hostelling

International hostelling and backpacking organisations, such as the Youth Hostels Association (YHA), have evolved to provide a major networked accommodation resource for hostellers, travellers who stay at youth hostels. YHA, a not-for-profit organisation, has over 3.5 million members and more than 4500 hostels throughout the world.<sup>2</sup>

## Travellers' information sessions

There are a number of opportunities and mediums whereby travellers can receive travel health advice. These include travellers' information evenings hosted by hostelling organisations within the travel industry, as well as hostelling brochures, magazines and travel guides. These sessions normally cover topics such as travelling healthy, the importance and coverage of travel insurance, immigration issues (such as working overseas), travel accessories, and a travelogue on youth hostels internationally, with about 10 minutes allocated to various speakers on these topics.

## Illness, injury and first aid

Conservatively, it is estimated that between 30-50% of travellers become ill or injured whilst travelling.<sup>3</sup> Relative estimated monthly incidence rates of various health problems have been compiled elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> The risk of severe injury is thought to be greater for people when travelling abroad.<sup>5</sup> It may be that travellers will be called upon to assist a fellow traveller or even themselves using the principles of first aid, with the assistance of a traveller's medical or first aid kit. First aid is "the initial care of the sick and injured" by people at the scene.<sup>6</sup> (p12). Subsequent emergency care in the field is referred to as pre-hospital care, which would normally be provided by "salaried ambulance officers, paramedics, nurses or doctors, who may administer drugs or use high technology equipment".<sup>7</sup> (p38). In some instances, pre-hospital care may not be available and first aid may have to continue until hospital or medical care is found. In Australia, there are a number of major providers of first aid training. These include St John Ambulance Australia, Surf Life Saving Australia, the Royal Life Saving Society, the Australian Red Cross Society, and state ambulance services.<sup>7</sup> About 250,000 of Australia's population of about 19 million people receive first aid training each year.<sup>8</sup>

## Travel insurance

Because of the costs of medical and dental treatment abroad, which may not be covered by private health insurance or national health services from the home country, and the high costs associated with aeromedical evacuation, all travellers should be advised of the need for comprehensive travel insurance. Fortunately, Australia has negotiated reciprocal health care agreements with several countries, but this generally covers only emergency medical treatment in a



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hospital.<sup>9,10</sup> Travel insurance normally underwrites travel, medical and dental expenses incurred by travellers abroad and arranges aeromedical evacuation of travellers under conditions specified by the travel insurance policy. Travellers should be advised to read their policies carefully to see what is covered, the level of the excesses, and to check for any exclusions. In particular, those travellers who have known pre-existing conditions, who are working overseas, or who are going to undertake any form of hazardous recreational or occupational pursuit may need to obtain a special travel insurance policy, which may attract a higher premium. Travel insurance agencies often provide a service to assist travellers in finding medical care while overseas. A common questions paper travel insurance and health has been published elsewhere, which gives details of selection of travel insurance policies.<sup>11</sup>

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