

Respiratory illnesses and dog bites a concern for travelers to China for 2008 Olympics

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As 600,000 visitors and athletes gear up to travel to China for the 2008 Olympic Games, travelers should be most concerned about respiratory illnesses and dog bites, according to report by an Emory University travelers' health expert, her colleagues at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and around the globe.

Dog bites in humans can lead to human rabies. The report finds that respiratory illnesses and dog bites are more common than contracting exotic diseases. Other common ailments seen while traveling in China were diarrhea, sprains and strains, and skin conditions such as eczema and insect stings.

The report, published in the July issue of the *American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*, gives vital information to help travelers plan their trips to the 2008 Olympics in Beijing next month. It also assists travel medicine experts and clinics around the world to better advise their patients about prevention during pre-travel visits and consultations.

"People tend to let their guard down and not use common sense while traveling, many times not considering they may be putting their health at risk," says Phyllis Kozarsky, MD, professor of medicine (infectious diseases) at Emory University School of Medicine, and medical director of TravelWell, a pre- and post-travel clinic based at Emory Crawford Long Hospital. "We advise travelers in our clinic to enjoy themselves while on vacation, but don't throw caution to the wind."

The report analyzed health outcomes associated with travel over the past 10 years to China and two other regions of Asia – Southeast Asia and India. The data were collected by more than 40 tropical medicine clinics worldwide, all part of the GeoSentinel Surveillance Network. The surveillance network, founded by the International Society of Travel Medicine and supported by the CDC, records health trends associated with travel to foreign destinations. TravelWell is one of the clinics that reports travel-related health data to the network.

The report found that respiratory illnesses, such as the common cold, bronchitis, pneumonia and asthma were the primary diagnoses of those seeking medical care, and the main cause of hospitalization while traveling in China.

Sprains, strains and cuts were also common problems during travel. Dog bites and diarrhea were the most frequent complaints for travelers receiving post-travel care back at home. There were only a few cases of exotic diseases diagnosed during the 10-year period. But the study authors found no reported cases of some of the most common exotic diseases, such as malaria, dengue fever or Japanese encephalitis.

"With China's air pollution problems, we were not surprised with the many patients who needed respiratory care while traveling," says Kozarsky, who is also a travelers' health consultant with the CDC. "But we were surprised by how many patients returned to travel medicine clinics after travel with animal bites – 400 dog bites, along with some cat and monkey bites over the 10-year study – and needed rabies vaccination."

China has the second highest number of cases of human rabies in the world, according to the report. In 2006, 140,000 animal bites were reported in Beijing. Nearly 3,300 people died from rabies in China in 2006.

"Olympic travelers need to be aware of this risk and avoid petting stray animals while in China," Kozarsky explains. "If they are bitten, they need to seek medical treatment immediately."

Kozarsky says planning and prevention are important before making your way to China for the Olympics.

"We recommend visiting a travel clinic several weeks to a month before your trip to get travel advice and make sure your vaccinations are up-to-date," Kozarsky explains. "While traveling, washing hands often to prevent illness and using common sense can help in decreasing your health risks."

Source: Emory University

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