

Vaccination against infectious disease low priority for Australian travellers

October 5 2012

New research led by the University of Sydney's Family Medicine Research Centre reveals many Australians are inadequately protecting against potentially serious infectious diseases before travelling abroad.

Researchers found more than one-in-two (57 percent) of those surveyed did not seek pre-travel health advice prior to international travel, despite having travelled to an at-risk destination for contracting at least one of the travel-related infectious diseases included in the study.

The study (PDF, 290KB), conducted between May and June 2012 in collaboration with CSL, involved 100 GPs nationwide who surveyed 2934 patients to analyse international travel patterns, travel health behaviours and pre-travel [vaccination rates](#) among Australian travellers in a general practice setting.

Christopher Harrison, senior [research analyst](#) from the Family Medicine Research Centre, who led the research, says the results indicate many Australian travellers may be failing to avoid unnecessary [health risks](#) while travelling abroad.

"A low proportion of respondents were fully vaccinated before travelling to an at-risk destination for a range of infectious diseases, including vaccination against Japanese encephalitis with only two percent coverage and rabies at only three percent," Mr Harrison said.

[Vaccination coverage](#) for other diseases was also low, including [hepatitis](#)

[B](#) (42 percent), [typhoid](#) (46 percent), and Hepatitis A (50 percent) infections.

Among those visiting at-risk destinations, common reasons given for not being fully vaccinated included patient refusal (31 percent); patient did not speak to their GP (16 percent); or leaving vaccination too late (7 percent).

"However, patients who sought advice from their GP prior to international travel were significantly more likely to be fully vaccinated against diseases common to their destination, thereby potentially avoiding serious infections while abroad," Mr Harrison said.

"These patients were also more likely to be given health advice specific to their travel destination, such as potential risks and ways to minimise infection while abroad, including preventing mosquito bites and eating and drinking safely."

Professor Robert Booy, Head of Clinical Research at the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance at Sydney Medical School says the results are concerning given that travellers play a significant role in spreading infectious diseases across international borders, through their travel patterns and behaviours.

"Australians are travelling in record numbers, making almost eight million short-term overseas trips within a year, with Indonesia the nation's second most popular travel destination. These travellers may be at increased risk of infectious diseases, including [rabies](#), hepatitis A and malaria."

"Yet many Western travellers, including Australians, do not consult a health professional prior to travelling and may be unaware of their need to protect themselves against [infectious diseases](#)."

"Vaccinated travellers are less likely to contaminate other travellers or the local population with various potentially serious diseases," Professor Booy said.

"Australians travelling overseas should be visiting their GP or travel health clinic at least six-to-eight weeks prior to departure."

More information: sydney.edu.au/medicine/fmrc/publications/2012-10-vaccination-infectious-disease-priority-australian.html

Provided by University of Sydney

Citation: Vaccination against infectious disease low priority for Australian travellers (2012, October 5) retrieved 17 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-10-vaccination-infectious-disease-priority-australian.html>

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