



## The pregnant traveller

### Is it safe to travel during pregnancy?

Pregnant women can be at increased risk of becoming infected or developing severe complications from some infections. Some of these infections can also affect your developing baby. If you are pregnant and want to travel, you should speak with your health care provider to discuss your travel plans and medical needs.

If you have certain pregnancy-related or medical conditions, you may be advised not to travel. There may also be certain regions where pregnant women may be advised not to travel to. For example, you or your close contacts may want to postpone travelling to areas where diseases or viruses such as Malaria or the Zika virus are common.

The safest time to travel is during 18 to 24 weeks of pregnancy. Most complications during pregnancy occur during the first and third trimesters.

### How can I prepare before I travel?

Before you travel, you can:

- Speak with your health care provider at least 6 weeks before your trip to discuss your travel plans, recreational activities, medical needs, and what you should pack in your travel health kit
- Contact your local travel clinic to determine any risks of travelling to your destination(s) and to ensure that you have the right vaccinations
- Find out what kind of medical care will be available at your travel destination
- Make sure you have adequate travel insurance in the event you require medical care or deliver your baby early. Many policies do not automatically cover pregnancy-related conditions or hospital care for premature infants
- Pack comfortable, loose fitting clothes, including long sleeve shirts, pants, closed-toe walking shoes, sunglasses, hat, sunscreen and insect repellent
- If your medication requires needles and syringes, take enough for the entire trip and carry a note from

a physician to authorize the possession of these materials

- If taking oral medication or insulin, pack enough supplies for the entire trip and keep them in your carry-on luggage. Carry all prescriptions with you
- Wear a medical alert bracelet if you have allergies, chronic disease, or other health concerns
- In case of an emergency, have an evacuation plan to a local medical facility with a safe blood supply

### What immunizations should I have before I travel?

If your immunization status is incomplete or unknown, be sure you have protection against Tetanus, Diphtheria, Pertussis, and Polio. You may also need the following vaccines:

- Hepatitis A
- Hepatitis B
- Influenza
- Rabies
- Japanese Encephalitis
- Meningococcal

Contact your health care provider or local travel clinic for information on the risk of infection while travelling, versus the risk of immunization while being pregnant.

You should not have the following vaccines during pregnancy:

- Measles, Mumps, Rubella (MMR)
- Oral typhoid
- Varicella
- Yellow Fever

### Can I travel by air?

Air travel is normally safe for most pregnant women up to 36 weeks gestation. However, there is a higher risk for pregnant women to develop a blood clot in the leg, also called deep vein thrombosis (DVT). To help avoid DVT, select an aisle seat if possible. Make sure to walk up and down the aisle to stretch your legs. You

can also stretch your legs while seated to increase circulation. Wear comfortable shoes and loose clothing. For more information about what you can do to decrease your risk of DVT, speak to your health care provider.

Travel in late pregnancy is usually restricted and may require a written note from a physician. Before booking your flight, check your airline's travel requirements for pregnant women.

If you think you might experience motion sickness, talk to your health care provider about medications that might help.

### **How can I protect myself against malaria?**

Malaria is spread to people by the bite of a female mosquito infected with malaria parasites. You are most at risk of serious illness and complications from malaria if you are pregnant, a young child or have a weakened immune system. Malaria increases the risk of miscarriage, stillbirth, and death for mother and infant.

Pregnant women cannot take certain anti-malaria medications and should avoid travel to areas where anti-malaria medications are required. If you must travel, visit your health care provider or a travel clinic to find out if there is a safe anti-malaria medication. You should also be more careful to avoid mosquito bites. For more information about Malaria and how to protect yourself from mosquito bites, see [HealthLinkBC File #41f Malaria prevention](#).

### **How can I protect myself against Zika virus?**

Zika virus is transmitted through mosquitoes. It can also be transmitted sexually and through blood and tissue products. Zika virus infection in a pregnant woman can cause serious birth defects such as microcephaly (an abnormally small head), brain abnormalities, vision and hearing loss, and more. In adults, there have been increased reports of a serious nervous system disorder called Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) following Zika virus infection.

For more information on Zika virus, including how to protect yourself and your family, see our Zika Virus health feature:

<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/node/health-feature/zika-virus>.

### **How can I prevent traveller's diarrhea?**

Traveller's diarrhea can be more severe in pregnancy. It can also pose a risk to your baby, especially if the diarrhea is caused by a more serious infection such as toxoplasmosis, listeriosis or hepatitis E.

Avoid using bismuth subsalicylate (Pepto Bismol®) to treat diarrhea. Speak to your health care provider about what medications you are able to take.

To help prevent traveller's diarrhea, you need to follow good personal hygiene practices and be careful about what you eat and drink. For tips on how to stay healthy while travelling, see [HealthLinkBC File #41e Traveller's diarrhea](#).

### **When do I need to seek medical care while travelling or when I return home?**

You should seek medical attention right away if you experience any of the following:

- Vaginal bleeding (passing clots or tissue)
- Belly pain or cramps
- Contractions
- Your water breaks
- Excessive (a lot of) leg swelling, pain or cramping
- Vomiting, diarrhea or dehydration that lasts a long time
- Fever
- Severe headache, visual problems, or pink eye
- Skin rash
- Joint and muscle pain

### **For more information:**

For more information about travel health, see the following HealthLinkBC Files:

- [HealthLinkBC File #41a Health advice for travellers](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #41c Travel immunizations for adults](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #41d Travelling with children](#)

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