

TRAVELERS' DIARRHEA

FACT SHEET



KEY FACTS

- Travelers' diarrhea is the most common travel-related illness
- It can happen in any place, but is more common in visitors to Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America
- It is often caused by bacteria spread through unsafe food or water
- In most cases, illness is mild and only lasts for a few days

SYMPTOMS

- Loose or watery stools, stomach cramps, nausea, fever, and weakness are common symptoms
- In most cases, symptoms are mild and go away on their own in three to four days
- Children are at higher risk of dehydration due to fluid loss

PREVENTION

- **Choose your food and drinks wisely:** Eat fully cooked foods served piping hot. Choose drinks in sealed bottles or cans. Avoid raw fruits and vegetables and drinks that contain ice.
- **Brush your teeth with clean water:** Use bottled water or boil tap water for at least one minute (3 minutes at high altitudes)
- **Wash your hands often:** especially after using the toilet and before eating food. Use soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

TREATMENT

- **Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of fluids.** Oral rehydration solutions available at pharmacies can help to replace lost salts and minerals.
- **Consider over-the-counter drugs like loperamide** to treat diarrhea symptoms.
- **Only take antibiotics if needed and as prescribed by a doctor or health professional.** Consider using them only for severe or distressing symptoms.
- **See your doctor** if you have severe or persistent symptoms, and ask for a stool test.

MORE INFORMATION

Travelers are advised to check official health information from their own country, such as:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, United States: <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/travelers-diarrhea>
- Travel Health Pro, United Kingdom: <https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/factsheet/53/travellers-diarrhoea>
- Public Health Agency of Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/diarrhea.html>

References

1. Steffen R, Hill DR, DuPont HL. Traveler's Diarrhea: A Clinical Review. *JAMA*. 2015;313(1):71–80. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2014.17006>
2. Riddle MS, Connor BA, Beeching NJ et al. Guidelines for the prevention and treatment of travelers' diarrhea: a graded expert panel report. *Journal of Travel Medicine*. 2017; 24 (suppl_1):S57–74. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jtm/tax026>

This fact sheet was developed by Sarah McGuinness PhD in collaboration with the International Society of Travel Medicine Digital Communications Committee.

Travelers' diarrhea | ISTM Fact Sheet | Version 1: October 2023