Pregnancy and International Travel

Before Travelling
- Be assessed by your health care provider(s). Discuss the risks of travelling with them.
- The safest time to travel when pregnant is between 18 and 24 weeks. This is when a pregnant woman feels better and is usually at the lowest risk for premature labor.
- Avoid travel if you have any pregnancy-related medical complications or serious underlying illnesses.
- Obtain the names of reputable doctors and hospitals at your destination. Determine if the facility can handle such medical emergencies as high blood pressure, premature or cesarean deliveries.
- Determine whether blood is screened at your destination for diseases such as HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C.
- Evaluate your travel health insurance and emergency medical evacuation insurance to ensure it adequately covers you and your newborn.
- Check with your airline or cruise line regarding their policy and any restrictions before booking your trip.
- Visit the International Travel Centre two to three months before your departure to determine specific travel risks. Certain immunizations may be recommended. You will also receive information on safe food and water choices, avoiding insects, altitude illness and jet lag.

Hazardous Destinations to Avoid:
- High altitudes or rugged terrain, especially where there is poor access to adequate medical facilities.
- Areas where life-threatening infections spread by food or insects are common.
- Malaria area. Malaria carries a high risk of death and complications both for a pregnant woman and her unborn baby. If it is necessary to travel to such an area, anti-malarial medication may be recommended along with other strategies to avoid insect bites.
- Areas where live virus vaccines are required or recommended (e.g. yellow fever).

Other recommendations:
- Travel with a companion.
- Carry a copy of your obstetrical records including your blood type and those of your travelling companions. Also, have your doctor’s phone number.
- Carry medications on your person at all times.

Air Travel
- Commercial air travel poses no risks to a healthy pregnant women or the fetus.
- Airport security radiation exposure is minimal, but a pregnant passenger may request a hand or wand search.
- Walk every half-hour during the flight (when safe to do so), stretch and do leg exercises frequently to prevent blood clots. Aisle seats, especially at the bulkhead, may be more comfortable. Support stockings are recommended for long flights.
- Drink extra non-caffeinated fluids to avoid dehydration. Avoid carbonated beverages which can increase bloating and gas.
- Position the safety belt as low as possible across the hips.
At Your Destination

- **Stricly** follow food and water precautions to avoid travellers' diarrhea and other severe diseases. Hepatitis E is not vaccine preventable and can be especially dangerous for pregnant women. Toxoplasmosis (a parasite from raw or undercooked meat) and listeriosis (a food-borne bacteria) can also be more dangerous for pregnant women.
- Preventing dehydration is very important during pregnancy.
- Do not use water purification systems which contain iodine, for longer than 10 days.
- For treatment of travellers' diarrhea, oral rehydration is critical. Pepto-Bismol® is contra-indicated but loperamide (Imodium®) may be used if necessary. Azithromycin or Cefixime antibiotics may also be considered.
- Follow strict mosquito precautions if traveling to an area with malaria or dengue fever, including the use of > 20% DEET repellants.
- Always use safety belts. Motor vehicle collisions are the major cause of injury and death in travelers. An unborn infant usually recovers quickly from safety belt pressure. Consult a doctor following any vehicle collision.
- There are medications for motion sickness that are considered safe in pregnancy. Talk to your doctor or travel nurse regarding these.
- Avoid the following activities:
  - trekking in remote areas,
  - water-skiing/ jet-skiing,
  - scuba diving,
  - high altitudes (>3,658m) or altitudes > 2500m in late or high risk pregnancies,
  - hot tubs, natural hot springs, saunas or other activities that might increase your body temperature.
- **Should you give birth while abroad:**
  - breastfeeding gives the infant natural protection against many organisms and eliminates the need to use local water
  - delay travelling until the infant is at least 48 hours old. The air sacs in the baby’s lungs may not be fully developed. Young babies are also very susceptible to pain in their ears with pressure changes during air travel
  - [www.motherisk.org](http://www.motherisk.org) provides expert advice on issues during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

For more information, call the International Travel Centre at (306) 655-4780
[www.saskatoonhealthregion.ca/internationaltravel](http://www.saskatoonhealthregion.ca/internationaltravel)